

What is Up and Down, Backwards and Forward?

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristchurchEastBay.org. Good morning, Christchurch. My name is Suzy Shin, and I'm part of the Wednesday Women's Group in Oakland, and the monthly Friday Families Group, also in Oakland. Today's scripture reading is from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 6, verses 17 to 36, as printed in your liturgy. A reading from the Gospel according to Luke.

He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there, and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases.

Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him because power was coming from him and healing them all. Looking at his disciples, he said, Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

[1 : 21] Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man.

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven, for that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

But to you who are listening, I say, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also.

If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

[2 : 26] If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.

And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.

Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord. Thank you, Susie, for that scripture reading. Good morning, everyone. My name's Andrew. I'm one of the pastors here. And I'm glad to open up God's Word with you.

Looking forward to diving into this text. Let's go to the Lord in prayer before we dive into His Word. Father, we pray that as we give our attention to Your Word, Your Spirit, which inspired this Word, would convict our hearts.

[3 : 41] That these familiar teachings of Jesus that we will hear and discuss today would strike us fresh and new, and that You would get rid of that familiarity, Lord, and bring conviction and concrete action in Your church.

That we'd be a people of love. That we'd be a people who are a countercultural force in this broken world, so dissatisfied with the status quo and so longing to bear witness to Your Son's better kingdom.

Make us that kind of a church, God. In Jesus' name, amen. This morning, we are opening up chapter 6 of Luke's Gospel.

It's a pretty lengthy portion, and some people like to call this, you know, you've heard of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5. Some people like to call this the Sermon on the Plain, all right? Because if you paid attention, in verse 17, it says, He went down with them and stood on a level place.

So they call this the Sermon on the Plain. They're not sure if this is, you know, combined instances or things like that. But, you know, we're pretty sure Jesus probably preached a lot of the same things, just like Jonathan and me do all the time in different places.

[5 : 00] So that's why you have a lot of overlap here. But we're gonna call this the Sermon on the Plain. And how He opens the Sermon on the Plain is with these two pretty famous and radical teachings. These might be some of the most famous and radical teachings that Jesus has given to us.

And it's definitely caught people's attention over the past 2,000 plus years because of how uniquely transformative and world-altering they've been.

And if I could just summarize these two teachings for us today, it's Jesus' teachings on whom He called blessed and whom we're supposed to love. Just two things, whom He called blessed and whom we're supposed to love.

And we're gonna look at these teachings today. But before we dive in, I wanted to share a story with you. I was listening to the podcast, The Voice of the Martyrs, not that long ago. And it was this YWAM missionary who went out to Nigeria, southern Nigeria, to serve a bunch of now single and widowed women.

About 100-something of these women who had to leave where they were from, northern Nigeria, because the Boko Haram and other Islamic terrorists had burned down their houses and murdered their families and they'd had to escape and run down to southern Nigeria.

[6 : 25] And so this YWAM missionary is just kind of recounting her experience there. And she tells the story of one evening, it's about 2, she says it's like 2.09 a.m.

and she hears this interesting sound, this beautiful sound, outside of where she's staying and she gets a light and she walks out to see what's going on.

It sounds like people are praying, crying out to God. It sounds like people are worshiping. And what she finds is that there are 100 women in the tent right next to her and they are worshiping and they are crying out to God.

and what they're doing is they are crying out to God for the people who murdered their families. They're asking God to forgive them, to send His grace, to transform them. And the reason why they're praying and crying out to God at 2.08 a.m. at night is because that's the time when many of their families are often attacked.

[7 : 26] So they're also praying against the darkness. They're praying against the evil forces that would go and still attack many of the other families and villages there.

And, you know, this YY missionary, she couldn't understand the language that they were speaking. She couldn't understand exactly what they were saying. But she said that this was the holiest moment that she'd ever witnessed.

The most beautiful, the most powerful, the most sacred, the holiest moment that she'd ever witnessed at these 100 widowed Nigerian women that we will never know or hear about otherwise, right?

And the question I want to ask is, what can possess a person, what can compel hundreds of women to do such a thing?

What would get us to love our enemy in such a way? And what could create that kind of community where we could look at them and say, wow, I'm sad for them, but man, these women are special women.

[8 : 33] Blessed are the poor. What kind of truth, what kind of reality do we need to confess?

Do we need to believe in that can do this in this world? That's the question I want to ask this morning as we open up this radical, truly radical teaching of Jesus here in Luke chapter 6.

So I want us to be asking, you know, when Jesus is saying, you know, blessed are you who are poor, and woe to you who are rich. I want us to be asking, is this really right? Is this really true? Do I want this to be right? Do I want this to be true? And can I believe this? Can I actually believe this and live like this? I want us to be asking those questions.

So let's now dive into our text. I want to start us in verse 20, actually. We're going to talk about whom Jesus calls blessed, all right? Luke 20, Luke 6, verse 20, it says, Looking at his disciples, Jesus said, blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

[9 : 44] Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man.

Now, I don't know about you, but, you know, I grew up in the church. I've, you know, read the Bible a handful, many times, and I've come across this verse tons of times in my life and, you know, for many years, I had a lot of trouble with this text because it seems super important.

It's like the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, the beginning of the Sermon on the Plain, everyone's memorizing it, quoting it, but I also had trouble understanding what this really means, these blessed are statements. Like, what is Jesus trying to communicate?

Is he saying that, you know, we should try to be poor and hungry to be blessed? Is that the requirement? Only the poor and the hungry can be blessed? Or is he saying there's a special blessing for those who are hated and for those who weep?

Or is he just kind of broad brush stroking this, you know, just speaking in generalities, you know, you're more susceptible to be blessed if you're poor because you're more desperate for God, more open to Him, more needy before Him?

[10 : 47] What is going on here in this text? Why does Jesus lead His most famous sermons with these lines, blessed are? Oh, in my, you know, in my studying, I found that what helps is if we actually notice who Jesus is speaking to, okay?

So look at verse 17 and I want you to try to imagine this crowd that Jesus is addressing. It says, a large crowd of His disciples was there and a great number of people, listen, from all over Judea, from Jerusalem and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon.

We're talking hundreds of miles apart. Many of these people probably traveled by foot, right? These people are desperate for what it says for healing. It says, who had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases, right?

So this is a large crowd, people who are tired, they've traveled a long way and it's a bunch of diseased people, right? And it says, those troubled by impure spirits who were cured, right?

So it's also a bunch of people who were maybe possessed and attacked and plagued by evil spirits, probably seen as crazy and probably very isolated in their communities.

[11 : 56] Maybe there are even people who feel very guilty and ashamed about how they let the evil forces into their lives, maybe through wicked acts or just poor decisions. And then look at verse 19.

And the people all tried to touch Him. Okay? So just think about this. This is a group of desperate people. They've traveled hundreds of miles hoping against all hope that by somehow touching this rabbi from Nazareth, they will somehow have their lives changed.

This is kind of a last ditch effort, right? Who would do that? Who of us would do that? Only the most desperate of us. And so this was the audience that Jesus had.

This is who He's speaking to. He's not speaking to elites. This isn't a rich, well-fed, laughter-filled crowd full of beloved and, you know, admired influencers. Jesus is addressing the poor, the desperate, the diseased, the powerless, the tormented, the troubled, the isolated, and the weary. People who couldn't save themselves and who knew that very well and whose last hope in the world was some random rabbi from Nazareth. So this is a scene that we need to have in our minds.

[13 : 10] And I want to make it clear now what Jesus is not doing when He's giving us these blessed are you statements. Okay? When Jesus says blessed are you, this actually isn't a blessing that He's pronouncing. Like, He's not calling some divine favor and divine blessing upon people.

There's a different and more specific Greek word that would have been used if He was doing that. No. Actually, the Greek word here for blessed just means happy, lucky, fortunate. You could even translate this as you who are poor, congratulations.

All right? That's what this word is kind of indicating. So Jesus isn't performing a speech act of blessing upon these people. No, Jesus isn't blessing anyone, but rather, He's making a statement. He's making a comment and a surprising one at that about who can be considered as blessed in His kingdom.

And apparently, it's not the rich, the well-fed, those who laugh, it's not those who are spoken well of, but it's the poor, the hungry, the weeping, and the hated. So really, this is more of an announcement than a pronouncement.

All right? It's not a promise, it's not a proverb or a formula. He's not setting forth a list of virtues and ideals for people to pursue so that they can be blessed by God. Jesus isn't saying, thou shalt be poor and persecuted, hungry and weeping in order to be blessed by God.

[14 : 21] He's not telling people to pursue poverty and persecution. Jesus never teaches us to pursue suffering just for the sake of suffering. I think Stanley Hauerwas says it really well when he writes, too often these descriptive statements are turned into ideals we must strive to attain.

As ideals, they can become formulas for power rather than descriptions of the kind of people characteristic of the new age brought by Christ. Thus, Jesus does not tell us that we should try to become poor.

He simply says that many who are called into the kingdom will find that, hey, a lot of us are poor. So again, Jesus' words here aren't virtues, proverbs, or commands or formulas or pronouncements. Jesus isn't telling people to pursue poverty, to mourn all the time and to go and get persecuted. No, what he's really saying is you can be all these things, poor, hungry, weepy, hated, excluded, and at the same time you can still be blessed in his kingdom.

That's the kind of kingdom he's here to bring. He's here to open their eyes and our eyes to the kingdom's radical reversal of the world's values. He's saying everything you thought about your worth and your status and your value, everything you've been told by all the empires of this world that the first shall be first and the last shall be last, my kingdom doesn't play by those rules.

[15 : 41] Their standards are not my standards. Their values are not my values. Thus saith the Lord Jesus Christ. You have heard that it was said, blessed are the rich, but I say to you, woe to you who are rich and blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God.

Sure, to be poor is fundamentally to lack what your community values, but in my kingdom you can be poor and yet you can have everything. You can have the kingdom. It can be yours.

In my kingdom, Jesus says, those who hunger will be satisfied at the end of the day. Those who weep will be laughing at the end of the story. And those who are hated and excluded and insulted and rejected on account of me, they will one day be vindicated because of their association with me.

Jesus is saying, just because you're on top of the world, just because you're an elite and a winner and an achiever and just because your life is going well, this may not mean that you are actually blessed.

You might be on the top amongst the empires of the world, you can be all the way at the top and yet not at all be a part of my better kingdom, Jesus says. And then he points us to the example of the prophets who many of them were persecuted and slaughtered and insulted and disregarded in verse 24.

[16 : 56] Even though they were disregarded by many kings and even if we may be classified as lowly, worthless, and insignificant by the kings of this world today, Jesus says we can rejoice. We can leap for joy because like the prophets, our reward is safe in heaven, he says.

And this is an established pattern that he wants us to see in our world that's actually gone upside down. You know, the only reason the first shall be first and the last shall be last seems to make sense to us is because we live in a fallen world.

That's the only reason that that makes sense to us. When God blessed our ancestors and called them to be fruitful and to multiply and to fill the earth, he didn't intend for there to be winners and losers in a zero-sum game.

Sure, he might have endowed Adam with certain unique gifts and then Eve with others, but they were not to compete with each other for a limited amount of resources in order to live and in order to thrive.

Their survival and their success weren't to be at each other's expenses. Their differences weren't meant for division and mutual antagonism, but for delight and mutual advancement.

[18 : 05] And any competition that existed was intended to serve the whole community and to help each other break barriers and further flourish. There was no first and there was no last, but they were to acknowledge and honor the image of God in every single human being.

They were to live by the self-giving spirit of God. This is what it was like when the world was truly right side up. But see, when sin entered the world, when humanity went our own way rather than God's way, and Adam set himself in opposition to Eve, and Cain set himself against Abel, and Cain and his descendants built cities and empires not for human flourishing, not for mutual generosity, but for mere survival and protection from one another, for building violent and competitive advantages against other tribes, humanity has lived in this fallen world for so long, and this is why the first shall be first and the last shall be last seems right side up.

Because of sin in this world, and because of the pattern of selfishness and survival by violent competition, the spirit of self-protection at all costs, it's just permeated all of our history, all of our existence, even if it means obliterating others, right?

So they have no chance of threatening us or our survival anymore. The spirit of self-protection has ruled our world ever since the fall, and it's whispered into our ears, hate your neighbor.

Hate your neighbor and seek their destruction, and then and only then will you survive and thrive. And this has seemed right to us in our sin and in our blindness and in our brokenness, that this is just how things are.

[19 : 49] Dog eats dog. Survival of the fittest. Might makes right. But Jesus, Jesus came to reverse the spirit and to restore his better, purer, righteous spirit.

So not only does he teach that the poor can be considered as blessed citizens in the kingdom of God, but that citizens in his kingdom must also love their enemies. They must also love their enemies.

Jesus comes in the power and the authority of a better spirit, not the spirit of self-protection, but Jesus is restoring the spirit of a self-giving love. Though now, it's got an even greater obstacle, right?

See, before the fall, self-giving love, that was natural, and there were no enemies to even hate. But since the fall, self-giving love has only become more difficult because we are now not just asked to give ourselves and our lives in love to our neighbors, but also to our enemies, those who hate us, those who threaten us.

Verse 27 says, but to you who are listening, I say, love your enemies. That is, love those who are the objects of your hate. That's what that word enemy means. Those who are the objects of your enmity and your hostility.

[21 : 00] And this is a radical and seemingly unnatural and impossible command. But wait, there's more. Do good to those who hate you. Meaning, actively work for the wellness and the wholeness and health.

Not just passively, don't attack your enemies anymore, but spend your energy to move toward them and to lift them up. Verse 28, bless those who curse you. Now this word for bless, this is the Greek word of speaking God's divine favor and abundance and generous blessing and shalom upon someone.

Jesus saying, do that for the person who hates you. Do that for the person who's done the exact opposite to you by cursing you. And pray for those who mistreat you, Jesus says.

This word mistreat can be translated even threaten or abuse. Pray for them, he says. Jesus is commanding something these people would never have heard of.

Sure, in the Torah, you have commandments like love your neighbor as yourself, but now Jesus is radically expanding the definition of who our neighbors are. Even the most hostile, even the most dangerous personal, political, and religious enemies, he calls us to love.

[22 : 11] And yet Jesus has even more to say to elaborate on what this kind of love for enemies looks like. Look at verse 29. If someone slaps you on one cheek, it's one of the most shameful, disrespectful things you could do to a Jewish man.

Jesus says, turn the other also. And this doesn't just mean let him hit you twice before you retaliate. In that culture, if you offered your cheek to someone, you were being vulnerable to them.

And you were posturing yourself toward them to receive a kiss. You were posturing yourself toward them as a friend, desiring a certain level of intimacy with that person.

Jesus is saying, treat your enemies as friends and give them another chance for friendship. Pursue friendship with them, invulnerability, even when you have no expectation that they will receive you as a friend, even after they've massively disrespected you and hurt you.

He continues, if someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. So he's saying, also be generous with your belongings toward those who dispossess you. And listen, he was talking to people right at the poor who might have only had one coat.

[23 : 18] When he's saying, do not withhold your shirt from others, he's saying, we love by becoming vulnerable and opening ourselves up to embarrassment and shame even to the point of being shirtless or perhaps even naked.

Give to everyone who asks you, he says in verse 30, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. You know, I think for many of us, whether Christians or not, the shock of this teaching, it may have worn off on us.

Like, of course. Yeah, okay, Jesus. I'll try to love more this Sunday. Of course Andrew is going to say that. I'll try to be more selfless. I'll try to be more sacrificial. I know.

I love Gandhi. I admire Dr. King. You know. But I want to challenge us to marinate in these words, to linger on these words and what they really mean concretely an hour later today.

Tomorrow. In your workplaces. In your schools. What does this mean? In your family rooms. In the places where you encounter people that you hate.

[24 : 28] Or people that hate you. Imagine how this crowd would have received the words of Jesus as they're being challenged to love their enemies. These are the poor and the lowly.

Maybe they've been thrown out by their families, deemed as too sickly, too challenging to care for. These are the people who maybe have been looked down upon their whole lives by the Pharisees and self-righteousness.

Been told that they're inferior in the eyes of God. Maybe they're thinking about the Romans who occupied their streets and dominated them with an iron will. Or maybe the tax collectors who cheated them and put more and more money into the Romans' pockets.

These are the people that came to mind. Who is it that comes to mind for you? Who is it in your life that God is bringing to your mind right now as He's challenging all of us to love our enemies?

Who do you hate? Let's be honest. Who do you hate? Or maybe who are you simply so indifferent toward that you never even considered them as someone that God wanted you to love?

[25 : 34] You never considered them as someone that God wanted you to pray for and actively work for their well-being because you didn't even have time of day to hate them. They might as well be non-existent to you.

Who is that person to you? In what ways is God wanting to enlarge our hearts? To mold them to be more like the heart of Jesus?

Because Jesus says if we only love our family and our friends, we aren't living in the supernatural, world-transforming love of Christ's kingdom, but only in the natural love that simply preserves our world's broken status quo.

Verse 32, if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.

And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.

[26 : 40] Then your reward will be great. And, listen to this, and you will be children of the Most High because He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. You see, when we love, especially when we love our enemies and those who don't or can't repay or even acknowledge our love toward them, that is when we are most human.

And that is when we are most like God. That is when we are most like our Father, closely identifying with Him as His image bearers, as His children. It's when we are being merciful just as our Father is merciful.

That is His heart. And that is His heart for who He wants us to be. In this world that says that mercy is unnatural and even contrary to justice, when we live in mercy, when we live in Jesus' upside-down kingdom as if it were the right-side-up way to live, we are illustrating and sharing God's supernatural love and exercising our highest calling as His children.

We are being our truest and most righteous selves in the presence of God as He intended. And listen, this is not saying just be a doormat, let people just walk all over you. This will look differently in people's personal lives and there are lots of different applications of this in corporate context, communal context, at the state level, at national levels, and unfortunately, you know, we don't have time to talk about political theology or, you know, a theology of passivism or just war theory or anything like that today, but, listen, we can get into these complex particulars.

We can talk about those, we can distract ourselves with those, we can talk about just war theory and passivism and self-defense, and we can let ourselves get distracted by all these complex applications of this passage, or, or we can admit that whatever loving our enemies might look like, none of us has arrived in doing that.

[28 : 34] None of us. Like, whatever you think about what this looks like and how to concretely, practically apply Jesus' words in the most complex situations, what is absolutely clear is that we're to love our enemies with a clear conscience before God and with sacrificial selflessness.

the question that will most honor God in response to this teaching this morning is not, when is self-defense okay? And when, you know, how does this work for whole nations?

How far can they go preemptively in self-defense? No, the question that will most honor God in response to Jesus' teaching here is, in the eyes of the Lord, am I loving my enemies with my heart and with my hands?

Am I acting for the good and the best interests of the people that I cannot stand? Am I pursuing their shalom? Or am I acting as if they are beyond redemption?

There are only two ways. You either believe that they are beyond redemption or you are acting in love for your enemies. And this is a word for us. When we are so tempted to believe that so many people and institutions and things in this world are beyond redemption and when we are so tempted to categorize others as deplorable and forever enemies and always wrong and without a trace of the image of God in them.

[29 : 59] But what if we had the eyes of Jesus? What if we had eyes to see as Jesus saw? Eyes for the poor, eyes for the hungry, eyes for the weeping, eyes for the hated, and eyes for our most vile enemies?

Or if we can't even think of these enemies, what if we had eyes for the people who are practically and virtually invisible to us? You know, something that's super interesting to me is that these two famous radical teachings from Jesus in the abstract as ideas, as ideals, man, people love Jesus' teaching about this, right?

People love these teachings from Jesus. Most people love this idea of the underdog. They love this idea of blessed are the poor and the hungry and the excluded. I love that they can be part of the kingdom.

Most people, even atheists, love the idea of loving our enemies. They would condemn religious people like us for doing the opposite. They condemn us by our own standards, right? Which they've just kind of selectively adopted for themselves.

But if you look at the way most of us human beings concretely and practically live and arrange our lives and express our values, none of us, even us Christians who preach this, none of us lives as though Jesus' words were good and true and good news for the world.

[31 : 10] Very few of us practically and functionally believe Jesus when he said, blessed are you who are poor or that loving our enemies is a good way to go about living in this dangerous world.

Most of us, most of, most all of us, we tend to see the world how Cain saw it. And we're all trying to build our cities, build up our numbers, wield various techniques and technologies to prolong our survival with no regard for how it affects others because that's our vision of the world right side up. But what if Jesus' seemingly upside down kingdom is actually truer and more righteous, a better vision of the world? My question for you is don't you want that to be true?

Don't you believe it's better? Can you believe it's better? And might God's spirit be challenging you to live as a citizen in his righteous and true kingdom even if it costs you like it costed Jesus?

You know, I get it. It makes sense to have trouble with these radical teachings. Blessed is the poor is only true if we can count on a new economy eventually coming. Blessed are the hungry is only true if a feast really is on its way.

[32 : 27] Weeping can only be blessed if we know that every tear will one day be wiped away. And blessed are you when people speak badly of you only if you can be sure that there's gonna be a final vindication and justification.

These statements by Jesus if they are not true if he is not Lord they are wildly irresponsible and he's a lunatic or a liar or you know a con man a wicked con man.

So the question is though is he? Who is Jesus to you? And can you see him as the God that he's revealed himself to be to us in the scriptures?

As the man he came to be sent from heaven. If we don't have eyes to see that blessed are the poor and that we should love our enemies it's because we don't have eyes to see Jesus.

Jesus was poor born in a manger Jesus was hungry in the wilderness Jesus wept for Lazarus and Jerusalem and Jesus was hated and excluded and mistreated as the son of God who stood for a different set of kingdom values.

[33 : 32] but is he not also the most blessed one we've ever seen? The one who for the joy set before him endured the cross for us and out of love for his father to save the world do we not believe that he is risen in power and joy and glory and do we not see the beauty of how he is the embodiment of God's love for enemies?

For while we were still weak Christ died for the ungodly for no one scarcely for one will scarcely die for a righteous person though perhaps for a good person one would dare to die but God demonstrates his love for us in Jesus in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us he gave up his cloak he gave up his tunic even his seamless undergarment he was stripped naked by his enemies to save his enemies father forgive them he cried Jesus sought the good of those who sought his destruction and death and he wants to raise up citizens who will do the same even if it costs us even if it costs us in the courts of the temporary judges of this world so might God be calling us to be citizens of Christ's kingdom and aliens in the empires of this world do you have eyes to see as King Jesus sees whether you're the poor or the rich whether you're the hater or the hated or maybe you're both right God wants you to see what he sees and he wants you to hear what his son has to say to you so if you're here today for those of you who are here and feeling down and out poor and hungry and you're feeding on your own tears and you're either detested by those whose opinions really seem to matter or they have no idea who you are and they don't even care to know maybe this is a word for you

I love how Pastor Tyler Staten says Jesus has this habit everywhere he goes of picking out the objectively least likely person and saying my kingdom belongs to you might this be God's word to you today in your shame and in your sense of worthlessness and unworthiness and insignificance might Jesus be crying out to you my kingdom belongs to you to people just like you Jesus' blessed statements here are a word of welcome and promise you are welcome into the kingdom and I promise you that you can belong here apart from your achievements apart from any of the achievements that you thought you needed to get to the table so if you're here today and you feel unaccomplished and unimportant virtually invisible if you feel like you have nothing to offer and far more need than contribution Jesus' word to people like you is that the kingdom can be yours too if you just come close to him you'll seek to touch him like the people at the sermon on the plane there's a seat for you at his table the place of highest honor even when all the other seats of power and privilege in this world seem off limits to you there's a better seat for you at Jesus' table but now maybe some of you are the very ones sitting at these privileged seats in the world you're at the top of your industries your workplace ladders you're the highest performers you've got the biggest bank accounts you've got the most accomplishments the most acclaim and affirmation from all your peers well thank God for your success sure for sure but have you also considered the value and worth of all your accomplishments and attainments in the light of God's kingdom in the light of Jesus' radically alternative economy in which the poor are blessed might Jesus be calling you to reassess and recalibrate your value system to better match his own might you live out blessed are the poor woe is the rich in your workplace in your spheres of influence do you live to bless the poor as Jesus did are the poor flocking to you is your presence in your community a sign of the healing and compassionate kingdom of God

I'm not just speaking to you I'm speaking to myself do we use our resources and our abundance and whatever gifts God has given us to bear witness to Jesus' way better kingdom and its alternative set of values Jesus' kingdom is unlike any other kingdom and the lives of its citizens will seem radically upside down and backward to the watching world but this is precisely this is precisely how we will win people over not through power but through love you know I can't verify this with 100% certainty but a handful of historians have quoted Napoleon Bonaparte by quoting something that he said to the effect of Alexander Caesar Charlemagne and I have founded great

empires but on what did we rest the creation of our genius upon force Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon love and at this hour millions of men would die for him it's really an undeniable fact the love of God displayed in Jesus Christ crucified and risen to put sin to death and death to death though neither that sin nor that death belonged to him this is what underlies all of our longings to believe in the power and the beauty of sacrificial unconditional love even for our enemies it's only the love of Jesus that can transform this world that has transformed this world that will transform this world you know in the 4th century the anti-Christian emperor of Rome Julian he tried to win Rome back to the pagan gods but he angrily marveled at the Christians and their ethic of love and he wrote this for it is disgraceful that when the impious Galileans the Christians support not only their own poor but ours as well all men see that our people lack aid from us and the Christian origin scholar Gerald Sitzler writes that Julian complained about exactly this kind of Christian service in spite of the loftiness of Julian's position and the vast resources of his empire he could not motivate his priests to follow the same way of life nor replicate the church's ministry to the needy but the difference went deeper than ethics Christians worshipped a God who loved humanity in and through his son Jesus Christ this Jesus son of God lord of lords king of kings had given his life as a ransom for many and this is the power that would change the world the love of Christ in our lives compelling us to love like he did as a light in the darkness let's pray oh lord would you make us that kind of loving community to the glory of [40 : 06] Christ and for the good of this broken world we pray in Jesus name amen■