



THE BEATITUDES, PART 1

Part 24 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 6:17-36 | April 18, 2010

Luke 6:17–36

¹⁷ And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.

²⁰ And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

²² “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

²⁴ “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

²⁵ “Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.

“Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

²⁶ “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

²⁷ “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

³² “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. ³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. ³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

INTRODUCTION

All right, well, here we are at the foot of the Sea of Galilee—about twelve miles across, six miles across, two hundred feet deep at its deepest point—the place where Jesus spent much of his ministry, and when you read stories about storms on seas, and Peter fishing, this is exactly the place that the Scriptures are referring to. And so today I’ve decided to teach from Luke 6. If you happen to have a Bible, feel free to go there.

And I’ll say as well that we’re not absolutely certain where the event in Luke 6 took place. I really appreciate the fact that the Bible tells us who Jesus is, and what he did, and what he said, and oftentimes doesn’t give us specific details regarding exactly where he was. I think there is a propensity for us all to commit idolatry, and to worship created things rather than the Creator God, just like Romans 1:25 says, and I love the fact that we don’t know some of the exact locations because people would turn them into holy places where you go to be closer to God, and you get mediation between you and God, and it’s a sacred place. And we don’t believe any of that, we believe all of that is accomplished in Jesus, that there’s one mediator between us and God, the man Christ Jesus, God who became a man. And we don’t necessarily have to go to the exact same place that he stood to be close to him, that he is gracious and benevolent and kind, that he is sovereign, and that he is present with his children wherever they go, and that means that your living room is as sacred as the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem because Jesus loves you and Jesus is with you.

But, nonetheless, we have chosen this spot to give you some idea of what the scope would have been for Jesus’ teaching in Luke 6; what the crowds would have seen, what they would have experienced, a bit of the topography, and so it helps to bring the story to life. That being said, in Luke 6 we’re dealing with the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes and it’s recorded as well in Matthew’s Gospel. If you are a student of Scripture, and have compared them, there are some similarities and distinctions. Matthew’s account takes about seven minutes to read. Luke’s account takes about two minutes to read. I am assuming that Jesus’ sermon was, in fact, quite long. The crowds would have traveled large distances, some walked for days, perhaps, to meet him and to see him, and I don’t think he would have given them a two-minute sermon. In fact, I’m certain that Jesus would have taught

for a very long portion of time. And so what you're looking at in Matthew and in Luke are summaries, these are the first-century version of Cliff Notes. That's what we get. So we'll go ahead and pray, and then read, and study a bit together.

Father God, I thank you for the Scriptures. I thank you that you have chosen to speak to us and to reveal to us who Jesus is, what he has taught and what he has done. As we open the Scriptures today, Father God, we ask as we hear the very words of Jesus Christ, that we would learn more about him, that we would fall more in love with him, and we would grow to be more like him. And we ask for this grace by the power of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' good name, Amen.

SIMPLE PEOPLE

Well, I'll start in chapter 6 of Luke, just to give you some idea of context. Verse 17, "And he came down with them and stood on a level place." So it was somewhere like this, imagine a terrace. "With a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all."

Let me just say this, when the Scriptures talk about a great crowd from a large region coming to see Jesus, this would have been very unusual, and it shows you something of the magnetic personality of Jesus. As you travel today into towns like Nazareth, you'll see 250,000 people. As you travel into some towns that are in this region as we tour, you'll see towns of 5,000, 10,000, 50,000, and it can obscure what was actually going on in the days of Jesus. In the days of Jesus, these were small villages. Nazareth was maybe fifty people, maybe a hundred people tops, ten to fifteen families. In our nomenclature, think three or four community groups, that was Nazareth. That was all of Nazareth. And so when you think of Jesus having large crowds and multitudes, he is drawing from a wide geographic area, whole towns. The synagogues, in some of these small towns, would only be able to accommodate twenty or thirty people. That's why Jesus taught in open areas. They didn't have religious assemblies. They didn't have rabbis who would gather the crowds that Jesus did.

In these towns, nearly all of the women would have been illiterate, only a small percentage of the men would have been literate. In a town like Nazareth, or some town like that—that was a very typical town in its day—with perhaps fifty people, five men were literate. They would gather in the synagogue, and the literate men would be welcome to read portions of the Old Testament. And so for Jesus to be a rabbi, this was very unusual for him to be an educated and literate man from a small town. For Jesus to be one who draws such enormous crowds would have been without precedent or peer. And sometimes we can read the Scriptures and think, well, yes, it says, for example, on another occasion in John's Gospel that 5,000 men alone came out to hear Jesus, plus the women, plus the children. That's perhaps 20,000 people, and then you think that the average town is fifty to a hundred people. Whole villages have shut down their shops for the day, they have made long journeys on foot, just to meet Jesus. They've heard about him, news of him has spread throughout the trade centers and the ports. Women are discussing this man, Jesus, at the well. The conversations after the readings in synagogue are about this rabbi Jesus who has magnificent authority and unparalleled power. And so you think of this extraordinary coming together of people over a wide expansive area to hear Jesus teach.

Now, the question then is: who were these people? And for the most part, they were very simple. As I told you, most of the women would have been illiterate. Most of the men would have been illiterate. Those who live near to the sea were fishermen and they were involved in that trade. Those up in the hills would have been herding animals or raising crops. You're looking at very simple people, most of them very poor. They would have saved their whole life for one journey, perhaps, to Jerusalem to make a sacrifice, and that would have been the biggest day of their life. You're looking at people whose life expectancy was into their thirties or forties, they're drawing water from wells, they don't have central heating, plumbing, electricity. Their homes are 600, 700, 800 square feet, on a portion of which they would have lived, and on another portion, they would have housed their animals. Very simple, very poor, very average, very common people who were under Roman rule, and as rulers would come and go, the kingdom would transition. They would rename their towns. They would reorient their geographic boundaries. They were under the rule of these mighty kings and this mighty kingdom, and these are marginalized peasants on the fringe of society. The major rabbis didn't come to visit them, people didn't invest in them. They were not considered significant or important in any way. Now, their kings were. Many of the towns in the area are named after the Caesars. So you see towns like Caesarea Philippi, that's after the Caesar Philip. You'll go to places like, for example, Tiberias named after Caesar Tiberius. You'll get names of towns after the king, so as the Caesars would change their rulership, so the names would change. And these commoners were just neglected and simple, and they were ruled over by this king and kingdom ideology of the Roman Empire and of the Caesars.

And here comes Jesus, not a man from a big city, but the little town of Nazareth. Not a man who comes from affluence, but a man who comes from poverty. Not a man who is unlike the peasants but, he, himself, is one of them. His dad was a carpenter. He grew up in a small rural town. He grew up as a carpenter. He grew up as one who was in every way a peasant: poor, humble, simple circumstance. And he becomes this magnificent rabbi that relates to those who are marginalized, depressed, and poor, and they are curious about his teaching, and they are drawn to his magnetic personality, his ability to cast out demons, perform miracles, and teach.

A COUNTERCULTURAL KINGDOM ETHIC

Well, then Luke records for us what Jesus taught. We established the scene, the setting, and the people who were present. We'll deal first with the Beatitudes, Luke 6:20: "And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!'" It's one of Jesus' favorite titles for himself. He borrows it from the Old Testament, and subscribes it to himself on roughly eighty occasions. "Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you

who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you, when all speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.”

And Jesus here is juxtaposing two categories of humanity: those who receive a blessing, and those who receive a woe. And what he does, he inverts the entire paradigm of the kingdom in which they are citizens, and shows them that he, himself, is in fact a king. He is, in fact, the King of kings, and he is above Caesar, which would have been the most preeminent human power that they could conceive of, and that he was bringing a kingdom over which he would rule as king, and the values, and the ethic of this kingdom would be diametrically opposed to the kingdoms of the earth, that he is in every way bringing a counter-culture. He is a cultural revolutionary in that sense. We like to use the language of Jesus at Mars Hill that the church is to be “a city within the city,” that we are to be a countercultural kingdom community, and as Jesus will teach, we handle wealth, and comfort, and power, and fame differently because of our citizenship.

So what we’re talking about here is that our identity establishes our lifestyle, that if you see yourselves as citizens of your kingdom—you’re an American, you are a German, you are from Singapore, you are from South Africa (and we have people present from all of these nations)—if your identity is in your nation, your political party, your ideology, your race, your culture, your creed, woe to you, woe to you. That’s a curse. That’s a judgment. For those whose citizenship is in heaven, for those whose king is Jesus, for those whose longing is for the kingdom, blessed are you.

And this is his juxtaposition, and as he explains this, he is really distinguishing between happiness and blessedness. One of the great problems in the United States of America is that we’re a nation built on the pursuit of happiness rather than the pursuit of blessedness. See, happiness is contingent on circumstance, blessedness is contingent on God. Happiness is ultimately temporary, it comes and goes, whereas blessedness is permanent because God is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. He’s always gracious, compassionate, and good. And so for those whose hope entirely resides right here, right now in this life, in this kingdom, woe to them. For those who are patient, for those who are humble, for those who, by God’s grace, belong to Jesus, blessed are they, blessed are they for their reward awaits them.

And what Jesus is teaching for those whose identity is rooted in this world and what it has to offer, this is as close to heaven as they will ever get. For those whose identity is rooted in Jesus as their king and their citizenship is in his kingdom, this is as close to hell as they will ever get. And so for those that have this as their heaven, woe to them because hell awaits them. For those that belong to Jesus and this is our hell, blessed are we because it gets better after this.

1. WEALTH

And so he breaks the kingdom ethic down into four categories, first regarding wealth, and what he says is that in the kingdom, those who are poor in this life will be rich. And he says that those who are rich in this life will be poor. Now, in saying this, we need to be very careful. Some who are Marxist theologians, and Liberation theologians, they will then build on this a social ethic that I do not believe that Jesus intended. Jesus is not necessarily teaching that those who are poor are more righteous than those who are rich, because there are some unrighteous ways to be poor. The Bible gives a few. One: you can be poor because you’re lazy, and you refuse to work, and the Bible says that that is a sluggard in Proverbs, that if a man does not work, he shall not eat, that if you are poor because you are lazy, you are not blessed, woe to you. Also, a second way to be poor is through injustice, where you rob people, you cheat, you steal, you’re greedy, and you hoard, and ultimately it costs you everything because of God’s judgment in this life. That’s not a righteous way to be poor.

There are a few righteous ways to be poor, though, one is through tragedy. Some of you have experienced this, you got sick, you got hurt on the job, one of your parents died and the other was sick, and you had to care for them, and that depleted your income and your finances. There are righteous ways to be poor, and some are poor because of righteousness. They won’t steal. They won’t cheat. They’re not greedy. They’re not, as the Bible says, lovers of money. They’re not people who have, as Jesus says elsewhere, mammon or money or wealth, and affluence as their God, and those are the kind of people that he’s talking to. These are people who work honestly, they live simply, their circumstances are considered humbly, and these are people who are poor. And he says, you will be blessed. In the kingdom, God will lavishly reward you, and you will be rich.

The same thing happened to Jesus. Paul says in Corinthians that though he was rich for our sake, he became poor. Jesus was poor, but he is not at present, that he is King of kings, Lord of lords, resurrected, ascended, and exalted, and right now Jesus is not poor. He’s not in humility, he’s in glory, and those who belong to him will be blessed to follow him. And even if you were poor, in the kingdom, you will be rich. You will be lavishly provided for. But he says woe to you who are rich, because you will become poor. If your identity is in money, if all you care about is making more money, if you’re greedy, if you’re stingy, if it’s all about status and possessions, if it’s all about accumulation and success, he says woe to you, because you worship money, you worship yourself. You’ve made the accumulation of wealth the center of your identity and existence. And he says woe to you, because on the other side of this life, in the eternal state, you cannot take it with you, and God will judge you, and you will be cursed.

And so Jesus says to have a long-term thinking when it comes to our wealth. And wealth is one of the prominent countercultural kingdom values. In fact, if you get your money lined up, you’ll get most everything else lined up, because Jesus said your heart follows your treasure. You put your money toward God, your life goes toward God.

2. COMFORT

Number two: he also examines comfort. He says, blessed will you be, those of you who are hungry in the kingdom, because you will eat well, and cursed are you who are gluttons and who overconsume, because in the kingdom you will be hungry. On the other side of this life, there will not be riches and reward for you. And what he’s talking about here is the idolatry of stomach. Paul says in the New Testament that for some their god is their stomach, that when they are sad, food becomes their comforter. When they are stressed, food becomes their reward. When they have done a good job,

food becomes their celebration.

Now, there is an occasion for feasting where we celebrate God and his goodness, and we get together and enjoy God as an act of worship. But what we're talking about here, like he said previously, you either worship with your wealth, or you worship your wealth, or you worship with your food, or you worship your food. In our culture, this is everything from anorexia and bulimia to gluttony. It's amazing that both are revolving around the worship of the stomach, and what he says is if you are a person whose identity is in food, whose life is only thinking about your meals rather than God, if your whole life is consumed in just gluttony, and feasting, and consumption—and we could extend this today to drugs, and alcohol, and addictions, and comforts, and pleasures of various sorts or kind—he says woe to you, because you're not going to God for comfort, you're not going to God for reward. You're not going to God for identity, and security, and significance, you're going to the fridge. Says woe to you. You have at the centerpiece of your existence, someone or something other than Jesus, but he says for those of who you are hungry, blessed are you, you'll eat well in the kingdom.

And we don't even know what this means because we're Americans. We don't even know what this means—hungry? Right now if the end of the world came, most of us would be fine for a few years, just from the pantry and the fridge. Some of you who have traveled with me, you brought lots of food with you, just in case, all right. And what we see is when the multitudes come to see Jesus, they don't have food. Is it because they forgot? No, it's because they don't have any. And so Jesus has to perform miracles to feed them, otherwise they don't eat. Most of us don't even know what hunger is. Don't let your children ever say something like, "I'm starving," because there are people who are and they would tell you that it's different.

And what we see is that in Isaiah, the prophet reveals that in the kingdom there will be the choicest of meats, and the finest of wines. Revelation 19 shows the kingdom being ruled over by King Jesus, and there will be a great wedding supper of the lamb, and the nations will sit at the table of Jesus and feast. So feasting is not bad, but to worship your food is different than to worship with your food, to thank God for your food. And he says woe to you whose God is your stomach, woe to you who eat well now, and don't feed others, and are not generous, and don't care for the poor, and don't share with those in need, because this is as close to heaven as you will get. And blessed are you who are hungry, blessed are you whose stomachs are growling as I teach. Jesus was articulating, because in the kingdom, there will be plenty for you to eat all the time.

3. POWER

Thirdly, he also speaks of power. He says, blessed will you be, those of you who are mocked, and oppressed, and suffer, those who are made fun of, sport of and light of, those who are mistreated, maligned, and abused. Some of you know exactly what this means. In our day, we would call these the victims, those who have been raped, and molested, and abused, those whose families have disowned them for the cause of Christ, those whose coworkers mock them because they're waiting until marriage to enjoy the benefits of marriage, those who are women who have foregone careers to be a mother, so that they can love their children and build their home, and they get scorned, and mockery, and questioning. Those who, like my family, have many children, and walking through most cities on the earth, have people stop, stare, count, whisper, sneer and I think, "Woe to you."

And what he is saying is that if you are someone who is without power, if you are someone who is without prestige, if you are someone who is without prominence—and these are people who are woefully insignificant. These people were not cared for. The Caesars didn't visit them, didn't consider them, didn't feed them, didn't serve them, didn't generally care for them. He says, "You know what? God does. God loves you as his children, God cares for you, and even though you are cursed now, you'll be blessed then. You'll go see your Father, and in his kingdom, you'll be his beloved children, and citizens of that kingdom." And he says, "Woe to you who make fun of others, who mock others, who make sport of others, who look down on others, who persecute others, who oppress others, who malign others, who abuse others." He says woe to you because you will stand before their Father, and you will give an account to an angry judge who will judge justly and rightly for all that you have done. Can you imagine the comfort for those who were present, those who had hunger in their belly, those who were going home to a simple existence, those who would die at a young age? And it was just generation after generation of simplicity, and poverty, and hopelessness. "You're telling me there's a king beyond the Caesar, there's a kingdom beyond Rome, and that there there's love for people like me, there is acceptance, there is grace, and kindness, and provision for people like me?" Jesus says, "Yes, that is the kingdom, and I have come as that humble king."

4. FAME

And then fourthly he talks about fame, and it's amazing that these are still the idols in our life: wealth, comfort, power, and fame. And fame here is idolatry, it is living for your name, your reputation. It's why one of the most popular television shows is *American Idol*, everybody wants to be an idol. I recently did a half-day shoot with ABC's *Nightline*. They're doing a ten-part series on the Ten Commandments, and I got blessed by God to do the segment on idolatry, so it'll be that episode. And so I was trying to explain to the reporter, idolatry, and I said, "Well, it's having anyone or anything as the center of your existence, the sum of your identity, the essence of who you are, what you live for, what's most important to you, what if taken from you brings you the most grief, tragedy, and sadness." And it sort of hit him and he said, "Well, then you're saying we're all idolaters." "Yeah, that's exactly what I'm saying," I said, "because we live for our own fame. We live for our own comfort. We live for our own pleasure, and the ethic of the kingdom is to love God and neighbor. It's to go out rather than in."

This is the whole distinction between Christianity and all other religions. All other religions are about going in, meditation, yoga, going in, me. It's all about me, discovering me, meeting me, finding me, serving me, glorifying me, honoring me. Jesus says, "No, it's not, it's about your Father. It's about the kingdom. It's about the other children in the family of God." That God has already loved you, and your fame is not in your performance, or your preeminence, or your prominence, or your prosperity, it's that your Father loves you, and that he has sent his son to die for you. You don't need to make yourself famous, you don't need to make yourself significant. So he says, "For those who are hated because of Jesus, those who are hated because they're citizens of the kingdom," he says, "you'll be blessed. The Father loves you, and in his kingdom you'll be treated graciously, compassionately. You'll be holding positions of prominence." He says, "Woe to you who live for the praise of men. Woe to you who worry about what

everyone thinks and your approval ratings.”

Proverbs 29:25 says that the fear of man is a snare, it’s a trap. If you live for the approval of others, that they would speak well of you, and bless you, and approve you, this could be parents, and friends, and coworkers. If they’re godly people who are encouraging you towards Jesus, that could be a good thing. But if they are wanting you to please them, and to satisfy them, and to honor them, and to live for them, so that they would praise you so that your identity would be in their adoration, Proverbs says that is snare, it’s a trap. It says at the beginning of Proverbs that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, so the answer is you live for God’s fame, you live for God’s name, you live for God’s glory, and you live for God’s approval. Your whole life is lived before an audience of one. And he says, “Woe to you who care what others think about you, and say about you, and blog about you, and chat about you, and Twitter about you, and Facebook about you. Woe to you who have ever Technorated yourself, or Googled yourself, woe to you.” Because it doesn’t matter what everyone says, if the Father is pleased with you, if he loves you, then you are secure, and your identity is rooted in his affection, not your performance, and not the votes of others. He then transitions, talking—and I hope you feel some conviction in this, I do. I’m preaching on the fame part in front of cameras and an audience, so the hypocrisy is now world class.

THE KINGDOM ETHIC IS LOVE

But he does introduce this countercultural kingdom ethic, that in the kingdom, wealth, and comfort, and power, and fame are dealt with differently. You say, “Well, if the kingdom of God is not about wealth, and comfort, and power, and fame, what is it about?” And he says, “It’s ultimately about love.” I’ll read that briefly, this is his second portion, verse 27, “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who,” what? “Hate you.” That’s a strong word. “Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat or abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak,” you only have one, you only have one. “Do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High—” there he is talking about dad, “For he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”

What he’s saying is take everything that you hold dear, and let it go. Your wealth, your comfort, your power, your fame, just let it go, just let it go. Jesus did. Did he have wealth? No. Did he have comfort? No. Was he in an official position of power? No. Did he have fame? He had fame, and then he had all of that fame turned toward venom. The same crowds who shouted, “Hosanna, Hosanna” shouted, “crucify him, crucify him,” so fame could be fleeting as well. And so Jesus is saying that the kingdom ethic is love, to love your enemies.

Who are your enemies? Don’t let this live in an ethereal, ideological, philosophical world. Right now in your mind, see the face of your enemy, the person who has done you the most harm, the most damage, the most evil, the most injustice, has caused the most grief, the most stress, the most anguish, the most strife, and Jesus says love.

Secondly, do good to those who hate you. He says, “It’s easy to do good to those who do good to you, do those who hate you.” Who hates you? Who really dislikes you? Who really despises you? Perhaps even who has disowned you, who has disregarded you? What he says is do good to them. Be kind to them, acts of grace, and mercy, and kindness. Don’t return evil for evil, the Scripture says elsewhere.

Number three: he says to bless those who curse you. How difficult is it when someone curses you, they speak evil against you, they attack you with their words, they malign your character, they gossip about you, rumor mongering, half truths and lies. The tendency is to throw more logs on the fire, Proverbs would say, and stoke it into a great inferno. That’s where James says that the tongue sets ablaze a mighty fire, and what he says is put water on that fire, not another log. No more reviling or gossip or anger or bitterness. Don’t return negative comment for negative comment, or negative blog for negative blog, or criticism for criticism; bless, bless, bless. And I want you to see this, friends, the most painful parts of life are the most glorious opportunities to live out the kingdom ethics. And so for the Christian what can often happen is when we find ourselves in these circumstances, we can ask God, “Why am I being persecuted, why am I poor? Why am I hungry, why am I hurting, why am I suffering, why am I opposed, why am I struggling?” And the Father would say, “Blessed are you. That’s a blessing. I’m giving you an opportunity to experience a bit of what Jesus did. I’m giving you an opportunity to become a little more like Jesus is, and I’m giving you an opportunity to show others a little bit of who Jesus is.” It’s an opportunity.

Every situation really comes down to your view of God. If you believe God is a God of woe, and he’s always judging you, and he’s always angry at you, and he’s always cursing you, and he’s always consequenting you, then when tragedy, strife, grief, poverty, and pain come, you’re angry at God, you’re frustrated, you run from God, you’re depressed, you’re despairing. And if you believe Jesus’ words, “Blessed are you,” you rejoice in all circumstances, and you look for the opportunity to practice the kingdom ethic, and to become a better kingdom citizen.

So here’s the big idea: Jesus won’t make you rich, he won’t make you powerful, he won’t make you comfortable, he won’t make you famous, he won’t make everyone be nice to you, he won’t make all your troubles go away, and idolatry teaches that he will. You can use Jesus for fame, comfort, power, glory. You can use Jesus for health, and healing, and success, and prominence, and all it is offering Jesus as the world’s greatest idol-giver, a means to an end. Or Jesus says, “Assume that your present circumstances are God’s blessing to you.” Assume that God is good. Assume that God is doing good. And some of you say, “But I have been abused.” That’s not your identity. Your identity is in Christ. You are loved by the Father. You’re a citizen of the kingdom, and if you get that, you can even bless those who abuse you. And if you don’t, you’ll become bitter, angry, hostile, selfish, self-righteous, judgmental, justified, woe are you, woe to you. See, Jesus is trying to save us from Satan, sin, death, and ourselves. Because when we are

attacked by the world's system and its ideology, the first inclination is to respond in a worldly way, rather than in a kingdom way.

He goes on to say, "Pray for those who mistreat you." You should have a list: who has mistreated you, who is mistreating you, in the future, who will mistreat you, keep a list. Does that mean you don't call the cops if they broke the law, or you don't call the church if there needs to be discipline, you don't confront them if they're in sin? Not at all, but you pray for them, two reasons: your heart and their heart. Your heart, that when you approach them, you do so righteously, not vindictively, not seeking your own vengeance, and you pray for their heart, that they would come to repentance and their senses, that they would come to Jesus, their king, that they would bow their knee, that they would join his kingdom, and that they too would become brothers and sisters in the kingdom.

He goes on to say, "Do not retaliate," number five. Don't return evil for evil, reviling for reviling, cursing for cursing, animosity for animosity. Some of you keep record of wrongs. First Corinthians says you should keep no record of wrongs, and the record of wrongs is this, "You did that, then I have the right to do something else." And some of you even do this in your marriages: "Well, you did that to me, so I did this to you." That's not the kingdom. Woe to you if that's your ethic. Do not retaliate.

Number six: he says give freely. This is where we really see if the ethic is sticking. People vote with their wealth. You give to your God. If your God is food, that's your first priority. The Bible calls it first fruits. If it's fame, glory, power, identity, prestige, and you're worried about what car you drive, what house you live in, and whose name is on your underwear, and that's the most important thing in the world to you. And if you can give generously, it shows that you do not have the mentality of someone who is rich. When Jesus rebukes those who are rich, he's rebuking those whose heart and their identity is in their riches. They're not generous, they're not good stewards, they're not gracious. For those who have an open hand, they see themselves as stewards, that everything belongs to God, and we're to give generously, and share freely, and steward wisely. He says, then there is a great blessing for those people. As Jesus says elsewhere, they're storing up their treasures in heaven. They're not hoarding and holding, they're giving and sharing.

And he says lastly, and this is the big idea. This is the big idea of the countercultural kingdom ethic of Jesus, treat other people the way you want to be treated. It's really that simple. Treat others the way you would want to be treated. Because what we tend to be, we are a nation, a people, a world, addicted to our rights, and completely oblivious to our obligations. We owe no one nothing, and everyone owes us something, and Jesus says, treat others the way you would want to be treated. The way you would like others to be obligated to you, you initiate by being obligated to them in that way of generosity, and kindness, and mercy, and compassion. The world knows nothing of these values. The kingdoms of this world know nothing of these values. Those who heard this in Jesus' day hadn't even considered that there could be a king like Jesus and a kingdom like his. And so they come from miles, they walk for days in the heat. They are sweating profusely. They are walking away from day's wages and labor as carpenters, and fishermen, and herdsman, and farmers, not because they're going to get anything, but the hope of the kingdom, and to meet the king. It meant everything.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS ABOUT JESUS

Now, I'll close with a few things. The kingdom of God is not about getting. That's what Jesus is saying. It's not about getting wealth. It's not about getting power. It's not about getting comfort. It's not about getting fame. And the kingdom of God is not about doing. It's not what you do so that God will be pleased with you. The kingdom ultimately is about being. It's about being in relationship with God. It's about being in relationship with God.

And there are two ways that some will teach you to work out the counterculture kingdom ethic of Jesus. One is absolute nonsense, religious garbage that arouses anger as I travel throughout this land, and I see Muslims, Jews, and Jack Christians who are religious, worshiping places, worshiping people, identifying themselves by their performance, and their power, and their prestige, and their prosperity. This is no holy land! This is a very unholy land! This is among the most unholy lands on the nation of the earth! The idolatry is steep and deep! It's just like the days when Jesus went to the temple, and absolutely was filled with fury. There is a righteous anger in the heart of God over those who would pilgrimage here, and cut in line for food, and steal, and cheat, and download porno in their hotel, and flirt with others, and follow ridiculous religious rituals, and then talk about the holy land. It's not about the holy land. It's about the holy king, and the holy kingdom, and repentant people by grace being connected to him, and being conformed to him. The kingdom is not about going somewhere, but about belonging to Someone.

And so for us, it is never a place, it is a person, and the center of our faith is Jesus. And it doesn't matter what hill they stood on, they stood there with who? Jesus. That's all that matters, friends. That place is nothing more than dirt, and that man is nothing less than God. And that's the big idea of the kingdom ethic. It's about Jesus. It's always about Jesus. It's completely, thoroughly, exclusively, continually, unswervingly, unendingly about Jesus, and he is the king, and it is his kingdom. And it is not about religious performance so that we could get wealth, and he would bless us, we could get comfort, and our life would be easy, that we would get power, and we would be able to control our own destinies, that we would have fame, and others would speak well of us. It's about him. It's about his name. It's about his fame. It's about his reputation. It's about his kingdom. It's about his ethic.

And those who would read this text like Mahatma Gandhi and say, "I don't believe Jesus is God. I don't believe he's savior. I don't believe he regenerates the heart. I don't believe he fills us with the Holy Spirit. I don't believe he gives us a new kingdom capacity through connection to the Father to live a new life. I just believe these are wonderful, ancient, moral truisms for good life." Woe to you if all Jesus is is a teacher. Woe to you if all he is is another charlatan rabbi, another philosopher. Woe to you. It is not only or even mainly about Jesus' teaching, it is firstly about his person and work. He's God come for us, the king has come in humble circumstances to a town that is small. He is come to nowhere to meet with no ones, and to love and to serve, and he knows that ultimately he is going to the cross where he would die for all of these sins, yours and mine included, that he would rise, and that he would go, where? To the kingdom to prepare a place for us, so that we wouldn't need to be cursed, that we could be blessed.

This kingdom starts in the church. There is an already/not yet aspect to the kingdom. I'll give you an excursus on eschatology, and then pray. Some will look around, and I've spoken with some Jewish people who have become friends, and I love, and I appreciate, and I enjoy, and they've been gracious

and nice. And I mean not to denigrate, but I do mean to instruct. And they would say, “Well, we do not believe Jesus is Messiah because we do not see the kingdom.” In the Old Testament, the great King David—he was the prototype and prefiguring of the coming of Jesus, the King of kings—was appointed king, and not yet reigning for a period of time. The same is true with King Jesus. He has been anointed and appointed king, and he has not yet returned to establish his kingdom on the earth. And so in the meantime, the kingdom is already/not yet, to use the language of Paul.

For those who have faith, eyes to see, and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, you see the kingdom. You see people repent of sin, you see selfish people become unselfish, you see greedy people become generous. You see shame-filled people be absolutely transformed by the love and grace of Jesus. You see people who are bitter become forgiving. You get to see, as a citizen of the kingdom and a member of the church, which is the outpost to the kingdom community, and the beginning, the dawning, the inauguration of the kingdom, and the rule of King Jesus, you get to see the kingdom. I get to see the kingdom all the time in the transformed lives of people who meet Jesus. So for those who would say, “Well, I don’t see the kingdom.” Well, it’s because you’re not part of the church. The god of this world has blinded some, so they don’t see the king and the kingdom. They’re not in the church, so they don’t see the work of the king and they don’t see the citizens of the kingdom, and they don’t see Dad’s love for all of his kids, and the transforming work in all of their lives.

If you want to see the kingdom, don’t look over the nations of the earth and ask, why are there still kings? Why is there still oppression, and injustice, and tyranny, and evil? Go into the church and meet those who’ve repented of sin and met Jesus, and you’ll see the dawning of the work of the king. You’ll see the beginning of the unveiling of the ethic of the kingdom. I see the kingdom all the time. Some of you I know well, some of you I’ve seen become Christians. I’ve seen some of you transformed. I’ve seen some of you married. I’ve seen some of you divorced, and not even fight for money from your adulterating spouse, not even argue, not even hire an attorney, not fight for your rights, not speak a cursed word, but intercede in prayer that they would come to Christ. I see the kingdom all the time. And for those of us who get to see the kingdom, blessed are we.

Father God, I thank you for the Scriptures and the Lord Jesus. Jesus, I thank you that you are a king. You look like a humble, Galilean peasant carpenter from a small town, and you were that, and God in flesh, King of kings. Lord Jesus, as you came humbly, we know your kingdom begins humbly and as you rose triumphantly and victoriously, we know that your kingdom will emerge triumphantly and victoriously. God, for those of us who are here and are convicted by the Holy Spirit of sin in our life, where we are operating by the ethic of this world rather than the kingdom, may we repent by the power of the Holy Spirit, may we be changed, may we not come here to see a holy place, may we come here to be a holy people, may we know that we don’t come here to get closer to you on this dirt, but we get closer to you through the Lord Jesus Christ who is our intercessor, our high priest, our advocate, our king. Jesus, we thank you that you came in humility, that you died and rose graciously, that you emptied yourself of wealth, and comfort, and power, and fame so that you could simply love, that you could love. And God, we know that God demonstrates his love for us in this while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus, thank you for dying for all of our sins, and thank you for adopting us into the family by the Father, as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, citizens of the kingdom. May we live out this new ethic, not of our own work, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, not through religion, but through regeneration, not so that you would love us, but because you already have. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.