

A new world order

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father, thank you that you are a good God. Thank you that you sustain us and you help us to persevere and you keep us going in every way.

And Father, we pray, Lord, that we will count every blessing that comes from you. Sometimes, Lord, we take them for granted, but help us to know that we are a blessed people because of what you have done in Christ.

And help us to look forward to the fullness of the blessing that we will enjoy in you one day. We pray that you would speak to us from your word now and remind us of all that. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Now imagine you are starting up something, a business, an enterprise, a program of some sort, something you believe that could have the potential to change the world.

And you've been given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to pick a team. People who can advise you, people whom you can learn from, people who can support you, people who might even go all the way with you.

[1 : 04] Who would you like to embody your project? Who would you choose? I imagine we want people we know are successful. We want people who have a proven track record, who have done well in their line of work, who have shown ability and aptitude and the know-how to get things done.

We want people who are popular, who have shown that they can get along with everyone, who have plenty of friends, people who have a rich and wide and vast network.

And we might even want people who are wealthy. Because, hey, any startup requires some capital to get it off the ground, doesn't it? These are the things we tend to value.

These are the people that tend to be our measuring sticks. Because they look like they have it made, and we want to be like them. They have wealth, comfort, success, popularity.

And the thing is, sometimes we bring the same measuring sticks into God's kingdom too. Who do we want to embody God's kingdom? Well, of course, those who look like they have done well in life, we say.

[2 : 22] Otherwise, non-believers won't even give us the time of day. Who do we want as our leaders and preachers? Those who have the title, doctor, behind their name?

Those who are eloquent? Those who say they are anointed and won't embarrass us? That's who we want on Jesus' team. We certainly don't want the clumsy, the ugly, and the ungainly to be the face of Christianity.

But in today's passage, Jesus will surprise us. This morning, we'll find Jesus is also in the business of starting up stuff. In fact, he's about to start something which will change the world.

After all, the existing stuff can't fulfill his vision. Remember last week, Jesus told us you can't pour new wine into old wineskins.

You can't make use of the existing man-made religious systems because they bring more harm than good. And sure enough, by the end of last week, Jesus' point is proven.

[3 : 29] What he says and does enrages the religious elite so much, they are now plotting to kill Jesus. How can a system that produces anger-filled desires instead of repentant hearts change the world for the better?

So it's time for a new beginning. It's time to start something new. But this is where Jesus surprises us.

Because as he gets his venture up and running, we discover his vision is different. His measuring stakes are different. His values are different.

His expectations are different. The new world order he's looking to start up is not at all like this world. In fact, it's upside down.

Because he says, actually, if you come on board my team, if you stick with me, then you better be prepared to be numbered among the lowly, the hungry, and the unhappy.

[4 : 40] Because that is who is going to be embodying Christianity. Hardly a winning recruitment strategy, is it? But paradoxically, Jesus says it's where you would want to be.

For although this new world order I'm establishing looks unappealing at first glance, it's where you will find true blessing. So this morning, we're going to take a deeper look at this new world order Jesus is establishing.

And we'll do so by looking at who Jesus calls to be on his team, what it's like to be on his team, and what happens if we opt out of his team.

So let's get started. Firstly, look who's on Jesus' team. In verse 12, we find Jesus engaged in prayer.

He's got some big decisions to make. And so he prays all night long on a mountain. Now that should get our hearts pumping. You see, in the Bible, whenever someone goes up a mountain, something interesting or significant usually happens.

[5 : 55] Think of Abraham going up the mountain in obedience to God's command to sacrifice Isaac. Or Moses heading up Mount Sinai to receive the law.

So verse 12 should cause us to pay closer attention. Could something momentous be about to happen? And just as an aside, although this is not the main point of the text, isn't it quite thought-provoking to realize even Jesus did not excuse himself from persistent prayer.

He's just escalated the conflict with his enemies. He knows he's about to make a big decision. And so he seeks his Father's face earnestly.

Now that's certainly a challenge to me. Given how seriously Jesus takes the discipline of prayer, do I take it too lightly?

Do I rush too quickly into things? In my own strength? In my own wisdom? When even the Son of God does not? If you haven't reflected on the state of your prayer life recently, that's just something for you to ponder.

[7 : 12] But anyway, back to the main storyline. Morning comes, verse 13, and he calls the disciples to him.

So we are getting excited. This group of disciples he calls constitutes the pool of available candidates. So who among them is going to be on Jesus' core team?

And given the anticipation, Wow, verses 14 to 16 feels a bit like a letdown, doesn't it? There are no dramatic announcements. There are no spotlights or voices from heaven directing Jesus exactly who to pick.

All it simply gives is a matter-of-fact list of names. It's a bit like election season. If you are someone who follows politics, Sometimes you get a sense of excitement, don't you, when you hear rumours that someone hot is going to be picked, or standing in a certain seat.

And you whisper to one another, Is it true that this party has picked Anwar Ibrahim to run here? Or is it true that that party has picked that local celebrity?

[8 : 27] And then nomination day comes, And the candidate who turns up, Turns out to be some low-profile guy that you've never heard of. What a letdown.

And that's how verses 14 to 16 can feel like. I mean, okay, we've heard of Simon Peter so far, And we've heard of Matthew by his other name, Levi, about two weeks ago.

But that's about it. Oh, wait, wait, wait. James and John were mentioned in the fishing story from a few weeks ago. But they were so forgettable, most of us forgot they were even on the scene.

These are not people who made an impression on you. They don't have a memorable track record. But you couldn't even single them out in a crowd. And yet, Jesus does.

One by one, he says, You're chosen. You're chosen. Until twelve are set aside. And that's significant. In the Bible, when you hear the number twelve, Your mind should drift straight away to the twelve sons of Jacob, Who would eventually become the twelve tribes of Israel.

[9 : 46] They were the foundational figures of the people of God. And now Jesus chooses twelve people again.

It's as if he's declaring, I am rebuilding the people of God. And these are the twelve who are going to be the very foundations. These unimpressive, forgettable people are the ones I'm naming as my apostles.

And what is an apostle? An apostle simply means, Send one. They function a bit like an ambassador. Just as ambassadors represent their governments, And bring messages from their nation's leaders.

So these apostles will represent the heavenly government, And bring a message from heaven's king. And Jesus says, These are the guys I'm recruiting to represent me and my kingdom. Now at first glance, What do you think of the people Jesus is recruiting? Well, if it was me, I'll ask him, Jesus, Couldn't you do a better job?

[11 : 08] I mean, Your first pick is Peter, Who will become most famous for denying his master. Well, that's hardly a quality you want in an ambassador.

And okay, Bartholomew, We never hear him doing anything bad. But that's because We never hear about him Ever again after this.

He just disappears. What's he doing? As for the two James, Which one is which again? And whose bright idea is it to pair Matthew, Who works for the Romans, With Simon the Zealot, Who is actively working against the Romans?

How is that going to work? And oh boy, Judas Iscariot. Need I say anything more? This is your idea of a new beginning, Jesus.

These are the people who are going to change the world. And Jesus says, Yes, Exactly. Haven't you paid attention to your Bibles?

[12 : 16] It is always the most unlikely people who do God's work. Think of both Moses and Jeremiah.

Slow of speech. And yet God says, They are the ones I've chosen to speak on my behalf. Think of Jonah, Who ran as fast as he could in the opposite direction, The moment God asked him to carry his message.

And yet God used him. And Jesus says, When it comes to choosing a team, I play by God's rules, Not the world's.

So yes, My team will have cowards, Doubtours, Even traitors. These are the people I want to bear my name.

They belong to me. And I belong to them. If my message is a message for the improbable, Then the messengers should probably be improbable people too.

[13 : 29] My friends, Do you see? In God's kingdom, That's how it always is. God's team is made up of Doubt people, Disappointing people, Even disloyal people.

That's the makeup of Jesus' original team. You have people who are too loud, People who are too impulsive, People who are too timid, All joined together on God's great adventure.

But that's who Jesus wants. And that is good news. After all, perhaps, At times, You've felt like a great big disappointment.

You've suffered from imposter syndrome. You've felt like a failure. I sure have. And well, Jesus is not ashamed of you.

He says, You can still be on the team. You can still be of use. In my kingdom, I specialize in such people.

[14 : 34] And because from history, You know that I use them powerfully, You can have certainty, I can use you too. Don't forget, Jesus could have operated on his own.

But instead, Throughout chapter 5, He begins calling people, Culminating in these 12. A few chapters later, He'll call another 72.

And then in the book of Acts, He'll commission the entire church, Including a former murderer, Whom we know as Paul, A deserter, Called Mark, And an almost entirely anonymous guy, That we've never really heard of, Called Tychicus.

This is Jesus' team. And if we follow the logic of the gospel, It makes sense, doesn't it?

If Jesus says his gospel is for everybody, Then his team would consist of, Well, Every category of people.

[15 : 43] That's the logic of the gospel. And no wonder in verses 17 to 19, We find everybody screaming to listen to him. They come from the south, In Jerusalem.

They come from the north, Outside of Israel, From Tyre and Sidon. Now that's a surprise, Because historically speaking, Tyre and Sidon are Israel's enemies.

But they're all curious, Because Jesus' message is so unusual, So counter-cultural. Now perhaps that's you today. You might not be a Christian here this morning, But you can't deny that you find

something magnetic about Jesus.

Well, if that is you, Keep listening. Because for the first time in Luke's gospel, Jesus engages in some extended teaching.

Now that he's got a crowd, Jesus says, Alright, I hope it's clear that I welcome everyone to be on my team, Even the fishermen and lepers, Even the tax collectors and sinners.

[16:50] But here's the thing. You need to understand what it's going to look like. And that's the second thing that we need to take a deeper look at. What it's like to be on Jesus' team.

What it's like to be on Jesus' team. And Jesus says, With him, We are going to have a life of blessing.

Well, of course, right? I mean, Is that expected? I mean, Why are the people coming? They wanted to be healed of their diseases. They wanted impure spirits cast out of them.

They knew Jesus was so powerful, They tried to touch him, Treating him a bit like a magical object. And isn't this what you come to Jesus for?

Because he's got the power, And he can give you the blessing, So you can enjoy life to the full? Hmm, but, Hang on a minute. What did Jesus really say?

[17:52] Let's read verses 20 to 22 again. Blessed are you who are poor, For yours is the kingdom of God.

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.

Okay, Jesus, Help me out here. I mean, Weeping equals blessing? Poor equals favour? What in the world are you talking about?

Well, let's examine these words. But first, Let me answer a preliminary question. Sometimes people ask, Is this part of Luke that we're reading today, The same as the Sermon on the Mount, Back in Matthew's Gospel?

After all, As we look at what Jesus teaches this week, And also over the next two weeks, We find a lot of the same material in both. But, At the same time, We find some differences as well.

[19:14] For instance, Here we find Jesus giving four beatitudes, That is, The blessed are sayings, Whereas, Matthew has eight.

And Jesus says, Four woes here, Which isn't in the Sermon on the Mount. So, Why is there a difference? Well, Well, I think the answer is quite simple.

As someone who sometimes teaches and preaches in other contexts outside KEC, I will often use similar material, But I might include and exclude stuff depending on the occasion and audience.

So, For example, Last year, You might remember that I preached Genesis 3 in our Sin Unmasked series. And then I preached a similar sermon at the chapel service of one of our Malaysian Bible colleges a bit later on.

But because of the time allocated to me, I abbreviated the sermon slightly. And because I was primarily talking to Bible college students, I applied the passage in a slightly different, And in a more specific way to them, Than I did to our congregation here at KEC.

[20:27] And I think it's the same here. Given his wide preaching ministry, Jesus probably taught on a subject more than once, And adjusted his wording and structure according to the context.

Sometimes he might combine a couple of different teachings together. So, When we look at Matthew, We realize the woes are not there in the Sermon on the Mount.

But we do find it in Matthew 23. Where it correlates with the Beatitudes. So, Jesus is probably repeating and rearranging his material according to his audience.

So, That's the preliminary question. But let's think now about what Jesus is saying. And let's make a few observations which will guide our interpretation.

First of all, Who is Jesus addressing? Verse 20 tells us, A mixed crowd is listening in, But in verse 20, He fixes his attention on the disciples.

[21:39] And then he says to them, Not blessed are those, But blessed are you. Direct address.

So, So, This is a message to all who follow Jesus in particular. Not just the crowd in general. He's addressing his disciples.

Now, That's going to be important to help us avoid some misinterpretations later on. Then second of all, How is verses 20 to 26 structured? Well, There's symmetry.

There are four beatitudes, Followed by four woes. And they are the direct opposite of each other. So, For example, In verse 20, He talks about the poor. While in verse 24, He talks about the rich. In verse 21, He talks about the hungry. While in verse 25, He talks about the well-fed. And so on. So, They're connected.

[22 : 40] And third of all, What sort of statements are the beatitudes? We must remember that what Jesus is doing here is offering descriptions, Not prescriptions.

In other words, This is not vending machine theology. In a vending machine, You put in some coins, Out comes a can of coke. But that's not how the beatitudes work.

Jesus is not saying, Be like this, Then you will get that. Poverty, And hunger, And weeping, Are not the means by which you get blessed.

Rather, He's simply saying, This is the status of those who are poor, The hungry, And the weeping. They are blessed. And fourth of all, What exactly does Jesus mean when he uses the word, Blessed here?

Well, I touched on this when we went through the sermon on the mount three years ago. But here is a brief refresher. Perhaps one helpful way of thinking about this state of blessedness is in terms of the sweet spot.

[23 : 56] For sportsmen, The sweet spot is that point when your foot, Or your tennis racket, Or your golf club, Makes the best contact with the ball.

For singers, It is that part of your vocal range where you sound your best. For investors, It's that position in the market where you make the best returns. It is that point where you are blooming, And thriving, And everything is just right.

Well, That's what it means to be blessed. Here is that sense of being in the sweet spot. So let's put some of these observations to work.

Let's look again at verse 20. Blessed are you who are poor, For yours is the kingdom of God. Whatever could Jesus mean?

Well, let's work out what he can't mean first. He can't be saying that simply because you are social, economically poor, That automatically grants you a spot in God's kingdom, Regardless of what you believe.

[25 : 08] For one thing, That would obviously contradict the rest of the Bible. But also, Again, Remember who he's talking to. He's talking to his disciples, As we said already.

And down in verse 22, He says that he's talking to people Who are in their current state Because of the Son of Man.

So when he's talking to the poor here, He's talking to Christians. Okay, Then you say, So does that mean that Jesus is just talking about some form of spiritual poverty?

Could he be saying something like, Oh, Blessed are you, Christian, Who are modest, And humble. Well, Again, Let's not be too quick to jump there.

After all, Remember how there is a symmetry between the blessings and the woes? And in verse 24, He says, Woe to you who are rich.

[26 : 13] And he certainly doesn't mean spiritually rich there. So let's not be too quick to over-spiritualize the poverty here either.

So what is he talking about? Well, Jesus seems to be saying this. He's saying, My friends, If you are on my team, Then you need to be prepared for the fact that you likely won't be rich.

After all, If your devotion is to Jesus, Your money belongs to him, Doesn't it? And that means you'll be using your money in ways different from the world.

You'll be generous with it. You'll be pouring it out to help those in need. You'll be giving it to gospel work. And if your devotion is to Jesus, You won't be spending your time chasing money all the time. You're not trying to maximize your productivity to maximize your wealth. You trust God to provide.

And if your devotion is to Jesus, Well, That means sometimes, You can't help but feel your lack.

[27 : 28] Can't you? You look at your peers, And sometimes you can't help but feel jealous that they seem to have more. Whereas your devotion to Jesus is costing you.

You feel poor. But Jesus says, That's what it's like to be on my team. If you are on Jesus' team, You won't be rich, Materially speaking.

In fact, Historically and globally speaking, Many Christians are literally poor. They literally have very little access to resources. But Jesus says, That is when you are blessed.

Why? Well, If you are poor because you are using what you have in line with the gospel. If you feel poor because you are not spending your time chasing wealth.

If you are poor because opponents of Christianity are robbing from you, As they do in some places. You are in the sweet spot. Why?

[28 : 41] Because those very struggles indicate you are putting Jesus first. Furthermore, When you are struggling, Often that's when you depend on God, Most of all.

Life is beyond your control, So you turn to God. And therefore, Yours is the kingdom of God. You are showing you are one of Jesus' team.

You are already under the rule and the care of the heavenly king. So what Jesus is really doing throughout verses 20 to 22, Is contrasting our momentary earthly circumstances, With our permanent belonging to God.

He is saying, If you live in light of the kingdom of heaven, And you are allowing this future reality, To define your present experience, Right now, You are blessed.

That's why verse 21, When you are hungry, You are still blessed because One day you will be satisfied. If you weep now, You are still blessed because One day you will laugh.

[30 : 05] You see, throughout these beatitudes, Jesus is describing one group, Not four different groups. He is simply describing those who are on his team.

After all, If you are poor, There will be times when you will be hungry, And if you are poor and hungry, Naturally, Sometimes you will weep. But if you are all those things, By virtue of being on Jesus' team, You are blessed.

You are in the sweet spot. You are on the right side of history. But here is the test. Up to this point, There would have been segments of the crowd That resonated with what Jesus is saying.

There would have been some who were poor, And hungry, And weeping, And maybe they were nodding their heads Enthusiastically at this point. But notice how Jesus doesn't end with verse 21, But builds up to verse 22.

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.

[31 : 23] Jesus says, Right now, You like what I say and do. I heal you, I say good things come to the poor. But where will you be When everyone turns against me?

Because that's what will happen to Jesus. Remember last week, People already want to murder Jesus. And by the end of Luke's Gospel, Different groups are conspiring To put him on the cross. And if you're on Jesus' scheme, Expect something similar. Expect to be hated, Excluded, Insulted, Rejected.

So that is the measuring stick. And the question is, Are you prepared for that? Are you prepared to give up respect From certain social circles that you move in?

Or even access to those circles? Because of Jesus. Are you willing to be misunderstood? And therefore, Mock, Even detested?

[32 : 40] Because your ethics line up with Jesus, And not the world's. Well, Jesus says, If you are disrespected, Mock, And detested, Not because you're being stupid and offensive, You know, that's a different story.

But simply because, You identify with Jesus, Because you're ready to stick with Jesus, Well, don't lose heart. You're blessed. But what happens if you opt out of Jesus' team?

That's the third thing we're looking at this morning. What happens if we opt out of Jesus' team?

Well, Jesus says, Woe. Woe.

What is a woe? Despite what it sounds like, It's not so much a curse or condemnation, But more like an expression of pity That such a curse or condemnation is coming.

And who are under a woe? Those of us who enjoy a good meal every now and then? Those of us who laugh heartily at our friends' jokes?

[33 : 54] Is that what verses 24 to 26 means? Thankfully, no. Rather, Jesus says, It is those who opt out of my team Who are most to be pitied.

Now, that really is a different perspective, isn't it? When we look around us, We automatically pity the poor, The hungry, And the weeping.

But Jesus reverses our point of view. He says, No. Don't pity those who are hungry Because they chose to follow me.

Don't pity those who are weeping Because they have chosen to sacrifice for my sake. They are in reality blessed. They will have their reward.

Rather, When people don't come to me, When people don't identify with me, When people don't stick with me, That's who you should save your pity for.

[34 : 59] Even though they are rich and well fed, Even though they are successful in the eyes of the world, Even though everyone speaks well of them, Verse 26, Because they will be standing in the line of false prophets.

They are standing in the line of those rejected by God. That's why you should have pity. So how's your perspective?

Do you envy the musician Who says he was once a Christian, But has since become more enlightened, And who now gets all the praises Because he's left behind the foolishness of religion? Do you sometimes feel the pull To join in with your friends And chase fulfillment that comes from the world? Well, Jesus says, What you chase is what you get.

If you want to chase comfort From riches that don't last, Then yes, you can get it. But in the end, that is all you get.

[36 : 12] That is comfort that doesn't last. If you seek satisfaction in things other than Jesus now, Then yes, you will be satisfied, But it will be like any earthly meal.

You could have an incredible meal At the best Japanese restaurant on this planet, But after 24 hours, You'll be hungry again. And you might find meaning temporarily In achieving your dreams, In securing independence, In cultivating your ideal environment, But one day you will wake up hungry again.

Because in the end, Only Jesus can fill you up to the degree That you crave. You were made for him. Without him, Where will you be?

You won't be laughing anymore. You will mourn and weep. And so Jesus says, Don't opt out of my team.

Even though it often looks upside down. Because actually, His kingdom is the right side up. And we are the ones, in fact, Who are upside down. So don't opt out.

[37 : 31] Instead, Have the right expectations. Loosen your hold on material things. Give it up And count the cost.

Expect to hunger And long for the world to be better. Expect to cry sometimes. Because sometimes, As you follow Jesus, Life is just hard.

That's how life is, On Jesus' team. But know that in all those experiences, In the experiences where you might be poor, Where you might be hungry, Where you might weep, You Are blessed.

In fact, Verse 23, Jesus goes a little stronger than that. He says, Rejoice in that day. Rejoice in the day you are hated, And excluded because of Jesus. Rejoice in the day you are poor, And hungry because of Jesus.

Rejoice in the day you are wholeheartedly living for Jesus. Because that means, You are on Jesus' team. You are on the team of the King of Kings.

[38 : 39] And if you are on Jesus' team, Great is your reward. Great is your reward. So today, If you know you are on his team, Don't leave disheartened.

Actually, As you hear his words today, Jesus wants you to leave rejoicing. For yours is the kingdom of God, Now, And forever.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, Father, As we hear your words this morning, We recognize that in many ways, They are challenging, Lord.

And Father, It's hard When we are poor, When we are longing for something more, When we weep now, When we feel excluded, Even insulted.

We find those things difficult, Lord, But help us to rejoice, Because We experience those things In your name. And if we do experience those things in your name, Lord, Help us to Rejoice, Look forward to that reward that we have, Look forward to Knowing, Lord, That You have An eternal inheritance for us.

[40 : 02] And until then, Lord, Help us to remember that You are the God who always uses the unlikely, The improbable, Even the frankly disappointing. And you are willing to use them to further your kingdom.

So give us encouragement from that fact. All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.