

Sermon Title: Living the Upside-Down Way

Series: Allegiance: All In for the King

Text: Matthew 5:1–12, Philippians 2:1–11

Big Idea: Living under King Jesus' rule means embodying His radically different values—love, mercy, humility, and justice—in everyday life.

Introduction: A Kingdom That Doesn't Play by Our Rules

Let's talk about something a little weird: Have you ever stopped to think about how strange some of our normal cultural customs are?

We wear shoes *inside* the house. We eat birthday cake after someone *spits* all over it. We wave to people we like by...flapping our fingers in the air? All of it is "normal"—but only because we're used to it.

Now imagine stepping into a new culture where everything feels flipped. That's exactly what it's like when you begin to follow Jesus. His kingdom doesn't play by the world's rules.

In fact, Jesus starts His most famous sermon—the Sermon on the Mount—with a list of people you'd never expect to be called "blessed": the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the persecuted.

If that's what His kingdom looks like...what does it mean to actually live there?

That's what we're exploring in this fourth message of our Allegiance series: What does it mean to live under the rule of King Jesus *right now*?

Point 1: The Upside-Down Kingdom of Jesus

Let's look at Matthew 5:1–12, ie, the Beatitudes. Let's take a closer look at these strange blessings Jesus offers at the beginning of His most famous sermon. These are the first words out of His mouth when He sits down to teach His disciples what life in the kingdom of heaven looks like. And right away, He turns every worldly expectation upside down.

"Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them." (Matthew 5:1–2)

That setting is important. In Jewish tradition, mountains were places of divine revelation—think of Moses receiving the Law on Mount Sinai. Now Jesus, the true and better Moses, ascends another mountain—not to give a new law, but to declare the values of His kingdom.

And what are those values? Let's walk through them.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

To be “poor in spirit” isn’t about material poverty—it’s about spiritual humility. It means knowing your need. The world says, “You’ve got this.” Jesus says, “Blessed are those who know they don’t.”

The kingdom of God doesn’t start with strength—it starts with surrender.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

In a culture that avoids pain and masks grief, Jesus honors it. Mourning isn’t weakness—it’s a sign that your heart is tender to the brokenness of the world and your own sin. And God meets mourners with comfort—not cheap clichés, but the deep presence of the Comforter Himself.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

Meekness is not weakness. It’s strength under control. It’s refusing to demand your way, even when you could. The meek may not trend or go viral—but they are the ones Jesus says will inherit everything.

This would’ve been shocking to Jesus’ audience. They expected the Messiah to conquer by force. But Jesus announces that His kingdom belongs not to those who grasp, but to those who trust.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

Righteousness here doesn’t just mean personal holiness—it also means justice. It means longing for things to be made right: in our hearts, in our homes, in our communities. When you ache for the world to be made new, starting with yourself, Jesus says you’re blessed—and that ache will be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

Turn on the news and you will know: The world rewards vengeance. But Jesus blesses mercy. Why? Because the King Himself is merciful. In His kingdom, mercy multiplies. And those who give it will receive it again and again.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

This isn’t about faking perfection as some sort of spiritual status symbol. It’s about undivided devotion. A heart that longs for God more than approval, comfort, or success. These are the people who will see God—not just one day in heaven, but in glimpses now, in worship, in prayer, in the everyday moments of grace.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

Notice: not peace *keepers*, but peace *makers*. This is active. It means stepping into conflict, misunderstanding, division—and bringing the reconciling love of God. To be a peacemaker is to do the family business of your Father in heaven.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Let’s be honest: this one’s hard. No one wants persecution. But in the upside-down kingdom, suffering for doing what’s right isn’t a sign that you’re failing—it’s often a sign that you’re following.

“Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you.”

Jesus ends the Beatitudes with a dose of perspective. If people push back when you live like Him—don’t be surprised. You’re in good company. The prophets before you experienced the same thing. This is what it looks like to stand for something that’s not of this world.

Putting It All Together

Each of these blessings is more than a nice slogan. They’re a direct challenge to how most people—then and now—define “the good life.”

Jesus is saying, “My kingdom is for the overlooked, the grieving, the gentle, the hungry, the merciful, the pure, the bridge-builders, and the brave.”

These are not entrance requirements. They’re invitations to live under the reign of King Jesus—a King who doesn’t conquer through power, but through peace.

And here’s the punchline:

These values aren’t just *descriptions* of life in the kingdom.
They’re *invitations* to embody the kingdom right here, right now.

They show us what allegiance to King Jesus *looks like on the ground*.

Each of these statements cuts against the grain of the world’s values.

- The world says, “*Blessed are the strong.*” Jesus says, “*Blessed are the meek.*”
- The world says, “*Climb the ladder.*” Jesus says, “*Come low.*”
- The world says, “*You’re blessed if life is easy.*” Jesus says, “*You’re blessed if you’re persecuted for doing what’s right.*”

As N.T. Wright puts it:

“The Beatitudes are not just poetic sentiments—they’re a radical agenda for Jesus’ kingdom, announcing that the world is being turned upside-down by the King.”
(*Matthew for Everyone*)

Jesus is describing what it looks like to live in allegiance to *Him*. And the values of His kingdom are not just ideas—they are embodied actions. Mercy. Peacemaking. Pursuing justice. Humility.

Here’s a practical contrast:

- Society says, “Look out for number one.”
 - Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers.”
- Culture tells us, “Show no weakness.”
 - Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”
- The world celebrates, “Get even. Don’t let anyone cross you.”
 - Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful.”
- We hear, “Follow your heart. Do what makes you happy.”
 - Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.”
- Popular voices preach, “Curate your image. Be impressive.”
 - Jesus says, “Blessed are the pure in heart.”
- Modern culture says, “Avoid discomfort at all costs.”
 - Jesus says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.”

When we pledge allegiance to Jesus, we step into a kingdom where *everything* is flipped—but everything is also being made new.

Point 2: Living as Citizens of the Kingdom

A few weeks ago, we looked at Philippians 2 to see the stunning path Jesus took to kingship—a downward path—how He emptied Himself, humbled Himself, and was exalted by God.

Today, we’re returning to that same passage—but not to talk about how Jesus became King. Instead, we’re asking: **What kind of kingdom does a King like that establish?**

And here’s the answer: a kingdom shaped by that same humility, self-emptying, and radical obedience.

If Jesus lived this way to reign, then surely this is how we’re meant to live to follow.

Paul starts with this:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves.” (Phil 2:3)

And then he says—look at Jesus:

“...who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage... he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (vv. 6–8)

Believe it or not, Philippians 2 is closely connected to the Beatitudes. When Jesus opened His mouth and gave the Sermon on the Mount, He wasn’t just offering good moral advice. He was giving us the **culture code of His kingdom**.

The *Beatitudes* aren’t personality types or spiritual achievements—they are the values that define the kind of community Jesus is forming.

And what’s amazing is that **Jesus Himself perfectly embodies them**:

- **Poor in spirit** – He emptied Himself, depending entirely on the Father.
- **Those who mourn** – He wept at Lazarus’ tomb and over Jerusalem.
- **The meek** – He did not grasp for power, even though He had every right to.
- **Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness** – His food was to do the will of the Father.
- **The merciful** – He touched lepers, forgave sinners, welcomed outcasts.
- **The pure in heart** – His intentions were never mixed—always rooted in love.
- **The peacemakers** – Through the cross, He made peace between God and humanity.

So when Paul says, “Have this mind among yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus,” he’s not giving us abstract theology. He’s calling us to **embody the Beatitudes**— just like Jesus did.

Jesus didn’t just *teach* kingdom values. He *embodied* them.

Michael Gorman calls this the pattern of *cruciformity*—shaped by the cross:

“Living in allegiance to Jesus means embodying his self-giving love—sacrificially serving others as he served us.” (*Cruciformity*)

Philippians 2 is a “master story” of what it means to live a cruciform life—**a life shaped by the cross and formed in the pattern of Jesus’ self-giving love**.

This wasn’t just a lesson in humility—it was likely an **early Christian hymn**, sung and repeated, passed down to shape the hearts of new disciples.

Think about that: when the early church gathered, they didn’t just recite beliefs. They sang about downward mobility. They worshiped a King who went low so that we could be raised. This kind of sung and repeated hymn would have established the kind of mentality and kingdom mindset that the early church was famous for!

That’s the kind of kingdom Jesus came to build. Not one of pride and power, but of grace and sacrifice. And if the King is like that—then so must His people be.

So what does that look like for us?

- In our families? It looks like choosing patience instead of control.
- At work? It looks like generosity over competition.
- Online? It looks like humility instead of hot takes and hostility.

If you're a citizen of Jesus' kingdom, your passport says *grace*, your native tongue is *forgiveness*, and your politics are driven by *mercy and justice*.

Point 3: The Power of Cross-Shaped Love

This kind of life isn't just different—it's powerful.

The world tries to change things through dominance, fear, control. But Jesus' kingdom spreads through love, mercy, and sacrifice.

The cross doesn't just save us—it *shapes us*.

When you choose humility over pride, service over selfishness, love over anger—you're not just being a "nice person." You are making the kingdom of God visible in the here and now.

Think about it:

- What happens when a child sees their parent choose gentleness instead of rage?
- What happens when a co-worker sees you forgive when you had every right to retaliate?
- What happens when a neighbor sees the love of Christ through your presence, your care, your kindness?

Those small, faithful acts of allegiance shine like light in a dark world.

As Jesus says later in Matthew 5:

"Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matt 5:16)

Maybe you've heard of the concept of a "counterculture." That's what we're called to be—not weird for the sake of weird, but different because our King is different.

So here's a challenge:

- Is there someone you need to serve this week?
- A situation where you could show mercy instead of judgment?
- An opportunity to advocate for justice with humility?

This is what kingdom life looks like. Upside-down. Cross-shaped. Jesus-centered.

Conclusion & Call to Action

When Jesus announced His kingdom, He didn't start with a sword—He started with a blessing.
When He claimed His throne, it wasn't a golden seat—it was a Roman cross.
And when He rose from the grave, He didn't seek vengeance—He offered peace.

So now He says to us:

“Follow Me. Live My way. Let the world see a different kind of King by the way you live.”

This week, pick one “upside-down” kingdom value and put it into practice.

Because in a world obsessed with pride, greed, and power—the greatest rebellion is humble allegiance to Jesus.

Let's live like citizens of His kingdom. Now.