



## Cross-Shaped Citizenship

JT English – June 17, 2018

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It's so good to be with you today. My name is JT English. I'm one of the pastors here on staff. I want to wish you fathers here a happy Father's Day. I'm just grateful for you and how you serve your families, how many of you serve our church so well, so happy Father's Day to you. I can't tell you how glad I am to be here.

The past three or four weeks in my family's life have been a deep challenge, which I'll talk about a little bit today, and one of the markers, kind of lights at the end of the tunnel for me, was to be here with you today and open God's Word with you and consider what the Lord might have for us. We're going to be in Philippians, chapter 2, verses 1-11. Paul writes to the Philippian church with the authority of Christ and by the Holy Spirit and says:

**"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.**

**Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.**

**And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Amen.**

Here's what we're going to consider today. After we did our series on the kingdom of God, I got a lot of emails. Several times when I was up here praying with people after services, the same question kept coming up. "What does it mean to be a citizen of God's kingdom? How can I know my life is resembling the citizenship I believe I have? How can I know I am walking in this Christian life in a way that is Christlike, that is according to the citizenship I supposedly have?"

I don't think there's any more important question we could be asking, because disciples of Jesus often confuse what it means to be a citizen of God's kingdom. We have a lot of examples of this in Scripture itself. One of the passages that came to my mind this week was Mark 10:35-38. This is a classic total mess-up by the disciples. If you want to find a place where, "Guys, you still don't get it," this is a place to go. They're misunderstanding what it means to be a citizen of God's kingdom.

James and John are on the way to Jerusalem with Jesus, and Mark 10:35 says, "**And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.'**" That's crazy, right? "Teacher, do whatever we ask of you." He said to them, "[Okay.] **What do you want me to do for you?**" Almost like he's trying to gauge their hearts. "What are my disciples going to ask of me? Do they understand what it means to reign and rule with me and to be a citizen of my kingdom?"

Verse 37. They said to him, "We really just want this very small favor. We're not going to ask a lot of you, Jesus. Just something very, very tiny, miniscule. You'll probably not even recognize that you gave it to us." "**Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.**" "We just want to reign and rule with you forever, Jesus. Will you crown us? Will you exalt us? Give us a position of honor and power and authority in your kingdom."

"**Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?'**" See, what do James and John think kingdom citizenship looks like? They think it looks like glory, being crowned with Jesus, reigning and ruling with Jesus, being given the position of honor, power, and authority to execute the kingdom of God however they see fit.

They want to be exalted with Jesus...honor, prestige, platform. "Let us just sit with you at your right and your left." "You have no idea what you're asking," Jesus says. I want you to consider a question with me. What are your expectations of kingdom citizenship? If you are here and you claim to be a

follower of Christ and a citizen of God's kingdom, what do you think that life looks like? Would you ask the same question James and John asked? Do you want to reign and rule in power with Jesus?

What are your expectations for tomorrow, for next week, for next year, for 20 or 30 years from now if you're still walking with Christ? What are you expecting your life to look like, your citizenship in the kingdom of God? This is exactly the question Paul is addressing in our text today in Philippians, chapter 2. I want you to look back to Philippians and go a few verses previous in chapter 1. In chapter 1, verse 27, Paul is trying to address this question.

He says, "**Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ...**" This is a really interesting translation. The term *manner of life* in the Greek is only used here once by Paul. He uses this term nowhere else. *Manner of life* can be translated a number of different ways. It's translated this way for a few reasons. Basically, the Greek term is where we get the term *polis* or *city* from.

Basically, what Paul is saying is, "Only let your citizenship be worthy of the gospel of the kingdom. Walk as citizens who are worthy citizens of the kingdom of God, no longer citizens of the kingdom of Rome." He's telling the Philippian church they should live in such a way that demonstrates they're no longer giving allegiance to Caesar; they're giving allegiance to King Jesus.

The Christians in Philippi have been living their entire lives as citizens of a different empire, of an empire from this world, but now Paul is trying to tell them, "If you claim to have a new citizenship, if you claim to not be giving allegiance to Caesar anymore but to Jesus, what does it look like to live a life in a manner that is worthy of the gospel or to be a citizen that is worthy of the kingdom of God?"

Paul wants us to know that if we have experienced a transfer of citizenship from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of God we also have experienced a transfer of allegiance, and that should be reflected in our lives in the rights, responsibilities, and rules for living as a kingdom citizen. Here is the main point for the day: *kingdom citizens live in humble imitation of Jesus by living cross-shaped lives.*

Look back at chapter 2 with me. What Paul is going to do in these first four or five verses is set at odds or contrast two ways of life or two citizenships or two ways of living. He's going to say, "Complete my joy by being of the same mind, same love. No selfish ambition, no conceit. Don't look out for your own interests but the interests of others."

He's contrasting two ways of life. The first we'll call the *A-shaped life*. This is an *A-shaped* life that Paul would have called a life of *ascent*, a life of progress, a life of things constantly getting a little bit better. We can have an individualistic mind and desires: You should pursue what you want. You should pursue what your desires are. You should set personal goals for yourself and constantly be getting just a little bit better. What should govern and rule your life is your own personal ambition.

You want to be better tomorrow than you were today and better today than you were yesterday. Ultimately, you should be proud of the life you're living. You should be ascending to your own throne, establishing your lordship. We believe that will actually lead us to a life of flourishing, a life of health, a life of prosperity, a life that might look like the kingdom.

Paul, though, says this is not the kind of life kingdom citizens live. This is the life that is lived by Roman citizens or by you and me every single day. Every single day when I get up and my feet hit the ground off of the bed, this is the kind of life I want to live. I want to live a life that pursues *my* personal desires, *my* goals, *my* plans, *my* ambitions. I have to crucify my *A-shaped* life every single day.

Paul contrasts this *A-shaped* life with what we'll call a *V-shaped life*. (No, that is not branding for The Village Church. We're not doing a "*V-shaped* life" campaign.) He contrasts this life of ascent with a life of *descent*. He says basically that we think the basic pattern of our lives should be progress, but the basic pattern of the Christian life is not one of continually getting better but actually one of following Christ to the cross.

The *V-shaped* life, Paul says, is this kingdom citizenship. It's not of ascent but descent. People who are living in the *V-shaped* life don't ask the question, "Can we sit at your right hand and your left?" He says, "You should participate in the Spirit. You should, as a community of faith, be living together, considering each other's interests. You shouldn't have divisive minds or divisive desires or your own desires but you should have unity of mind and unity of desires."

The Philippian church was living in a highly stratified community, whether it was race or social status or class, and they were asking the question, "Can a Roman citizen be involved in the same group as a Jewish immigrant? Can a slave and a master worship in the same community?" Paul says stratification will not do in the kingdom of God, because citizenship in the kingdom of God is no respecter of persons, because God is no respecter of persons.

We live in a unity of mind, in a unity of love. Each kingdom citizen is called to the hard work of reconciliation and unity. This word *humility*... If you like writing in your Bible, mark this. This word *humility* is a brand new word for the Christian community. The Greek philosophy looked down upon humility. You and I live in a culture where we think humility is a virtue to be praised. For Paul, this was a radical claim, because that community would not have prized humility.

"You shouldn't be humble; you should think highly of yourself," Greco-Roman thought would believe. Paul says here, "Don't pursue an *A*-shaped life. Take the lower seat. Be humble." The term Paul uses here is a brand new term, because he knows a prideful attitude cannot bow to God's purposes, and often a prideful attitude will confuse one's own selfish desires with God's will.

Then he says in verse 5, "Have this mind, which is yours in Christ Jesus..." Think about this. There's no other place in the Bible where you can get insight into the mind of Christ. Everywhere else in the Bible we have the actions of Jesus described and depicted for us, but what Paul says here is that this text is actually giving you insight into the *why* behind what Jesus did. You and I could actually have the same mind Christ had. We could have insight and revelation into *why* Jesus did what he did.

He says, "This is the mind of Christ." Think about this for a second. What if Christ had pursued a life of ascent and not descent? We would be in our sins without any hope. If Christ had considered his own personal desires, his own selfish ambitions, if he had lived a life of pride and not humility, he would not have descended to us. That's what Paul is trying to get at here.

He's contrasting this *A*-shaped life, the life you and I and the Philippian church would have wanted to pursue every single day of their life, with a *V*-shaped life. He's saying, "If you're truly kingdom citizens, if you truly have been impacted by the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, you will no longer live an *A*-shaped life according to your own selfish ambitions, desires, pride, and conceit, but rather you'll give yourself away, because there's nothing better than Jesus."

So let me ask you a question...*Do you, by default, think your life is a story of continual progress?* Do you think you'll be healthier next year than you were this year? Are you healthier *this* year than you were *last* year? Do you think you'll be wealthier next year than you were this year? Are you wealthier *this* year than you were *last* year? Here's a question for fathers, as I'm a father myself. Which lifestyle are you going to encourage your children to embrace?

Are they going to embrace an *A*-shaped life or a *V*-shaped life? This is when Christian discipleship and family discipleship meet the road. What if your children will be ostracized because of their faith, not embraced? Would you still encourage them to follow Christ? Christ is calling us and Paul is calling us to a *V*-shaped life, not a life of ascent but a life of descent. Which shape represents your life? Which shape represents the default you wake up with every single day?

Look at verses 6-11. You could call this passage the *master story of the Bible*. In this passage you have everything. You have the entire gospel. What's incredible about this passage, verses 6-11, is this is actually an early Christian song. This is a song the Philippian church was singing in worship services on a regular basis. Paul had heard this song, and he takes the song and puts it in Scripture because this song encourages them to embody the way of Jesus in every part of their lives.

This is the *V*-shaped life of Christ. Verse 6: "Though he was in the form of God..." Though he had a lofty status, the loftiest status imaginable, he didn't grasp after it; rather, he emptied himself. He didn't fill himself up with power; he emptied himself of power and actually took the form of a servant. Though he was in the form of God, he didn't grasp after it but embraced being the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

He would take upon our suffering, our powerlessness, our humiliation, our small stature. He then would live in humble obedience, obedience even to the point of death. One of the most powerful elements of this early Christian song is that it's criticizing the world's picture of strength and saying, "Strength is not found in pride but in humility." Remember what we just talked about a few minutes ago about humility?

Not only is Paul saying *you* should be humble; he's saying *God* is humble. If that doesn't strike your imagination to worship in adoration and praise... You don't serve a God who throws his weight around but humbles himself to come to you. He meets you in your darkness, in your weakness. He doesn't desire that you would have to chase after him, but he chases after you. In Christ we see that God is humble, even to the point of death, even death on a cross.

What this passage is trying to do is show you the character of God. From our human perspective, what would you have expected Christ to do? If we expect to live an *A*-shaped life, wouldn't we have expected *him* to live an *A*-shaped life? Rather, he doesn't grasp after his power and authority and ambition but embraces servanthood. He embraces humility. He embraces powerlessness. He embraces humiliation.

I love verse 9, which says, "Therefore [since he didn't embrace an *A*-shaped life but a *V*-shaped life], God has highly exalted him. Therefore, he has bestowed upon him the name that's above every name. Therefore, at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess, in heaven and on earth, that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father."

What is this passage teaching us? It's teaching us that the cross comes before the crown. It's teaching us that suffering comes before glory. It's teaching us that the story of the Bible is God's relentless pursuit to meet us in the grave and raise us to new life in Christ. One of the greatest dangers to your discipleship, I'm absolutely convinced, is expecting the crown before the cross. One of the greatest dangers to your discipleship is to expect glory before glory is here.

That's exactly what Jesus' disciples were expecting. "We just want to reign and rule with you at your right and your left. We're expecting glory now." But Jesus says, "You have no idea what kingdom citizenship is. You must embrace a *V*-shaped life, a life of weakness, suffering, powerlessness, and humiliation if you truly are citizens of my kingdom, and *then* I will raise you up out of the grave, and *then* I will give you new life, and *then* I will exalt you, but the cross comes before the crown."

I want to invite you into some things that have been going on in my life the past month or so, where I've had to embrace powerlessness, humiliation, shame, and weakness. I was supposed to preach this message three weeks ago, right after the kingdom of God sermon series ended, when Travis Cunningham gave his great message. I was intending to preach this passage. I couldn't because of some things that happened in my family, which I'll get to in a minute.

The reason I was going to preach on this passage, Philippians 2:1-11, is because it has been central to my spiritual formation and my life. The Lord saved me when I was a freshman at Colorado State University. My roommate was a part of Campus Crusade for Christ. There was a Bible study that met in the laundry room of the basement of our dorm that he kept inviting me to.

FYI, if you're ever going to start a Bible study, don't do it in the basement of a dorm, because you're going to have a very difficult time getting people to go. I was like, "No, I'm not coming to a Bible study in the laundry room of the dorm. No way am I going to that." Well, by sheer willpower he kept asking and asking and asking, and eventually I showed up.

We're downstairs, and they're in the book of Jonah. I have a Bible I had barely opened my entire life, and I can't find Jonah in my Bible. It's a very, very small book. I didn't know this at the time. Again, I'd never opened my Bible. I couldn't find it, so I began thinking to myself, "Oh my goodness. I'm in a cult. I have arrived at a cult. These brothers have a book in the Bible that I do not have. I need to get out of here quickly. The door is over there. Oh my goodness. When they pray, I'm making a run for it."

But then I heard about the grace of God, that God would be gracious and merciful to a prophet who had been disobedient. That's the first time I ever understood that God could be gracious and kind and lowly with his people. They shared the Four Spiritual Laws with me. A sophomore in college came up and said... This is the most un-compelling gospel presentation ever. He said, "I'm supposed to read this with you." I'm like, "Okay."

We just read it. "God loves you. He has a wonderful plan for your life. Jesus died to save you from your sins. Will you accept him as Lord and Savior?" I was like, "Yes, I will." In that moment, no joke, my heart of stone became a heart of flesh, the scales fell off of my eyes, and I embraced Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord. I couldn't help but believe.

The first passage I memorized as a Christian was Philippians, chapter 2, because our Campus Crusade for Christ director encouraged us to, so this has always been a major part of my life, a passage I'm continually going back to and looking to for encouragement and embracing what the Christian life ought to look like. This was actually the passage Macy and I had read at our wedding.

If you were to ask my wife and me independently, "What passage are you basing your relationship on?" we would both say, "Philippians, chapter 2." That's why I wanted to preach this message to you three weeks ago, but a few months ago my wife began to experience some pain in her leg. She's fairly active, so we thought it might be tendonitis or tightness or soreness or stiffness or something, so we were getting massages, resting, and icing for several months, just trying to treat it.

Four weeks ago on a Sunday, I was upstairs in my office preparing, getting ready to preach this sermon. Jason Holleman was in my office. We were kind of diagramming what this sermon might look like. I got a call from my wife that she wanted to go get an MRI because the pain had gotten so severe she thought something was wrong. So she went to an emergency clinic over here and got an MRI.

The next day, Monday morning, I was in a staff meeting here, and it was my wife on the phone, and she was in tears. She said, "They found a mass in my leg. They found what looks like a tumor." My heart just stopped. The air left the room. I could not even begin to think about what the future might look like. "Is this cancer? Is this something else? Oh my goodness. What are we going to do?" My mind just starts racing.

I rush home, and she basically says, "We have to go see a specialist on Friday, and they're going to give us a reading of the MRI." So we have to wait four days. I can tell you I felt absolutely powerless, absolutely weak, having no idea what the future held for my family, for my wife, for my kids, for me. We started thinking through next steps, and we were trying to just get to Friday, get to Friday afternoon, just try to get to Friday, just anything we could do to get that day to come quicker.

We dropped our kids off at my parents' house. Again, we're just terrified about what this doctor's appointment might be. We dropped the kids off at their house, and we had about an extra hour or so. We just had this prayer we were saying over and over and over again.

"God, would you meet us in our brokenness? God, would you meet us in our weakness, in our powerlessness? God, would you descend and meet us here? Would you so fill us with your Holy Spirit we would have a peace that surpasses all human comprehension, because we can't do this on our own. We are terrified. We need your help. We need your strength, because we have none of our own."

We had about an extra hour. We're praying this as we drive down. I turn on a podcast, and the podcast is actually on Philippians, chapter 2. I'm like, "Wow! That's providential." We then get down to the doctor's office with this extra hour, and my wife said, "Hey, why don't we go into Watermark?" Watermark is a great church down in Dallas that is in gospel-centered partnership with us, and they have a wonderful foyer set up.

So we sat down in the foyer, and we said, "Let's just read the Bible. Let's just pray. Let's try to quiet our hearts before we go into this meeting. Let's ask the Lord to meet us here." We were sitting on a couple of couches. There was a fireplace in front of us. It was kind of a *U* shape. There were three couches shaped like a *U*. Macy was sitting on the one on the left, I was sitting in the middle, and the one on the right was empty.

It was a Friday afternoon, so there was almost nobody else in Watermark. It was empty. If you would have come in there, you would not have sat down by us, but lo and behold, this super awkward brother comes and sits right down next to us. *Right* next to us. I'm just like, "Come on." I'm kind of a social introvert, and I'm like, "Oh my gosh! What am I going to do?"

I'm feeling this tense pain literally in my soul, like, "God, will you please take this away? I just need some time with my wife." We're reading, and my mind is racing. "What is going on over here?" He's just being socially awkward. He's not looking anybody in the eye. He's looking at his phone. He's mumbling. I'm like, "Oh my goodness! What is happening?" I'm dying inside a little bit.

Out of nowhere, he begins reciting Philippians 2:1-11 with more precision, power, and clarity than I've ever heard it before. He says, "If there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any comfort from love, if there's any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, having the same love..." He just continues.

I am overwhelmed by the presence of the Lord, that he would meet us in our brokenness and despair and weakness and humility. I move over and go sit down next to my wife, and we just begin praying. "Lord, meet us here. We don't know what's next. I feel terribly powerless, but would you meet us here? Would you make us strong?" We get done praying. I look up, and he's gone. He's just not there anymore.

I have no idea who that was. I don't know if it was an angel. I don't know if it was a brother being obedient to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. It could have just been a super socially awkward person doing Scripture memory. I have no idea. But do you know what I *do* know? The Lord met us. He preached the gospel to us through this brother, and I heard that God is the God who bends low, who lives a V-shaped life in order to be with his people when they are powerless.

So we go to the doctor's office. After a long wait, we get called into the examination room. The doctor walks in, and the first thing he says when he holds the MRI is, "This looks really scary. This looks like cancer. I think your wife has what's called sarcoma, which is a super rare form of cancer, and it looks high-grade. It's probably spreading in her body."

I have never felt so powerless and weak. I would have taken it in a moment from my wife, but of course I couldn't. He says, "We need to do a biopsy in order to confirm that this is the diagnosis." So we do a needle biopsy a few days later, and Brian Miller, who's one of our lead pastors, so kind and

gracious to us in this season, came with us. It was just me and him sitting in the room after the biopsy. Macy was still under anesthesia.

The doctor walks in and says, "It looks like this is sarcoma. I think your wife has cancer. We need to begin radiation." In God's providence, we went to a radiation meeting the next day. I won't say his name, but it was Matt's radiation oncologist. Just in God's providence, that he would love The Village and care for us.

I can't tell you how dark those few weeks were. I simply don't have words. I know some of you have lived this. I know some of you are living it. I can assure you all of us *will* live it. But the Lord descended to be with us. He was in the room with us by his Spirit, encouraging us, embracing our powerlessness with us, because he draws near in darkness.

Christ is the Great High Priest who embraced humiliation and powerlessness so that when *we* embrace humiliation and powerlessness he meets us there. I'm here today to testify that that's true. He meets his people in darkness. He meets his people in the grave, because he knows the way out.

The oncologist said, "I want to get another pathology report reading on this, because there are some strange things in the pathology. We're going to send this to an expert at Harvard and have them take a look at this and confirm the reading." So we had to wait another week before we could begin treatment to confirm that this was her diagnosis.

We had a staff Restore about two weeks ago on a Wednesday morning. It was the first staff event and only staff event I've been to since this happened. I walk in, and our interns are leading our staff Restore. The intern gets up and says, "The passage I'd like to read over you is Philippians 2:1-11." I'm just like, "Oh my gosh, Lord! This is so awesome and painful. Why are you doing this?"

That was Wednesday morning. I shared with the staff what we were walking through. We were at ELP a few weeks back, and so many of you prayed for us back there, knowing what we were walking through. I can just think 20, 30, 40 times people praying, "Lord, just let this be benign. Let the reading be wrong. Maybe you can heal her, take it out, whatever."

That Wednesday night we get a call from the pathologist. Macy puts it in speakerphone. He says, "I have really good news. This looks benign." Yes, praise the Lord. What she has is way too technical to walk through. She has a tumor. It's basically a bone developing in her leg. It is super painful. She has

done two natural births, and she said if that's a 10, this is a 7 or 8 in terms of the pain scale. It's going to be 6 to 12 months of treatment.

It's still horrible, but it's not cancer, so we're praising the Lord, but we're still embracing our powerlessness and weakness, because there's nothing we can do. She can barely walk right now. She's just powerless, but I can tell you this: over the last three weeks I have never seen somebody walk closer with Jesus than my wife. In the midst of her humiliation and powerlessness and weakness, she walks with Jesus.

Here's the good news: there will be a day when all of us embrace this *V*-shaped life, and the good news is that Jesus emptied himself for you. Jesus took upon the form of a servant for *you*. Jesus was born for *you*. He humbled himself for *you*. He became obedient even to the point of death for *you*, and he now reigns as King forever for *you*. He is the Great High Priest who reigns and rules, knowing his people will embrace powerlessness, humiliation, and weakness, and he says, "I will meet you there if you live a *V*-shaped life."

I want to walk through a few implications for us and ultimately invite you to something. The first thing is I want you to reject an *A*-shaped life, this life that thinks it's continually going to get better and easier and more and awesome and progress. The *A*-shaped life says, "I am king; Jesus is not." The *A*-shaped life is actually just Jesus' disciples' attempt to establish their own lordship.

If you are continually trying to live this *A*-shaped life of progress and things continually getting healthier, wealthier, and better, you're actually just trying to establish your own lordship. So here's the question I want you to ask yourself...*Do you want the benefits of the crown or the price of the cross?* Are you just looking for the benefits of the crown or are you also willing to embrace the price of the cross? Are you the disciple who asks Jesus, "Grant us to sit one at your right and one at your left"?

Why should we reject the *A*-shaped life? Because it's an illusion. It's an absolute illusion that can be taken away from you at any single moment. When you think you are your strongest, you're actually at your weakest. When you think you are climbing the hill of progress, it's then that the fall comes. So instead, as a church and a community, just like Paul encourages the Philippians, not just individual Christians but the community of Christians, embrace the *V*-shaped life, the life that descends, not the life that ascends.

Embrace the V-shaped life, because that's the life that says, "Jesus is King, and I am his citizen. I'm imitating my life after *his* life." Christians who wish to imitate Jesus must follow the downward trajectory of the kingdom. Friends, the kingdom is not up; the kingdom is down. The trajectory of our lives should not be up; the trajectory should be down. When you think you are your strongest you're actually your weakest, but when you are weak in Christ you are actually at your strongest. Do you get that?

When you are weak in Christ, when you hold your hands up in the air and say, "I have nothing left; I need you," you're proclaiming to the world there is nothing better than Jesus. There's nothing better than Jesus and his cross. When we live lives of descent, we proclaim that Jesus is King. I can testify to this. I imagine you and I are afraid to live lives of descent. It's costly. It hurts, and it's painful. I am afraid to live a life of descent because I think God isn't there.

I think God will only meet me in my ascent, in my progress, that God wants to see me grow, that God wants to see me better, that he wants to see me do more, but I can testify to you after these three weeks that God *is* there. He *is* in the depths. He *is* in the darkness. He meets us in our weakness. We think we have to climb a mountain into the heavens in order to meet God, but in reality God has descended from the heavens in order to meet us on a cross.

Many want the kingdom but few want the cross. Do you want the kingdom? Then embrace the cross, not just the crown. Many want to feast with Jesus but few want to fast. Many want to rejoice but few are prepared to suffer. Many want miracles but few will endure the shame of the cross. Kingdom citizens embrace the cross-shaped life. Indeed, this is what Jesus teaches his disciples and us in Matthew, chapter 16.

What does he say? "If any of you want to come after me, if any of you wish to follow me, deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow me. For whoever will save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Do you know what Jesus does not say here? He does not say, "Pick up your crown and follow me." He does not say, "Follow me into my glorious kingdom." He says, "Follow me to the cross. Follow me to self-denial, to pain, to suffering, to weakness, humiliation." He says, "Pick up your cross and follow me."

Friends, the passport of kingdom citizenship is not a crown; it is a cross. Paul was well acquainted with this, of course, when he says in Galatians 2:20, "**I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live...I live by faith in the Son**

**of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."** He would live a downward trajectory in order to be in relationship with us.

Friends, the pursuit of exaltation will lead to your destruction, but the pursuit of humility will lead you into the kingdom. So I want to ask you a question this morning. Where do you need to embrace your powerlessness? For some of you, that might be right in front of your face. You are met with your powerlessness, your weakness every day. Maybe it's an unreconciled relationship. Maybe it's a health diagnosis. I don't know what it is for you, but for many of you I know it's front and center.

I want to encourage you to embrace your powerlessness and be reliant upon the Lord Jesus Christ who *will* meet you there, I assure you. Where do you need to embrace your weakness, your humanity, your frailty? For many of you, and I would put myself in this category... If I would have been asked this question four weeks ago I wouldn't have known how to answer it, because I thought things were pretty good. I felt strong. My family felt healthy.

It felt like things were going well, like we were living this life of ascent, but when I thought I was strong I actually realized I was at my weakest. So do the work of considering where you need to embrace your powerlessness before it meets you in the face. You cannot be a citizen of the kingdom of God if you have not had your life shaped by the cross. In other words, you cannot be resurrected with Jesus if you have not first been crucified with Jesus. If you have not died to Christ, you will not live with Christ.

Fathers, here's a question for you...*Will you lead your family into an A-shaped life or a V-shaped life?* I know I, as a father, want to be strong and powerful for my kids, but the Bible, the citizens of the kingdom, Christ and Paul say, "Don't embrace a life of power; embrace the cross. Deny yourself and follow me."

We began by reading that question Jesus' disciples asked in the gospel of Mark. "Can we just reign with you forever?" They misunderstood kingdom citizenship. They thought the crown came before the cross. At the very end of Jesus' earthly ministry, he's asked a very, very different question by a very, very different man that shows exactly what kingdom citizenship looks like.

In Luke's gospel in Luke, chapter 23, Jesus is being crucified, and there are two men, one at his right and one at his left, just like the disciples asked to be placed. Remember when they asked him? "We

want to be at your right and your left when you come in glory." "You have no idea what you're asking, because I will be crucified with thieves."

One of them asks the most important question in the Bible. "Jesus, you're the King. Will you remember me when you come into your kingdom?" Which question would you ask Jesus? "Jesus, can I reign with you forever?" or "Jesus, might I be crucified with you so that when your kingdom comes I will be with you?"

These are two pictures of discipleship. One uses the Lord Jesus Christ to pursue power, prestige, and honor. The other worships Jesus Christ by embracing the cross and simply says, "Jesus, will you remember me when you come into your kingdom?" What does it mean to be a citizen of the kingdom of God? Kingdom citizens live in humble imitation of the Lord Jesus Christ by living cross-shaped lives. Let's pray.

Father, you are indeed a good Father, and you know our weakness and our powerlessness, even if we don't right now, but I know many of us do. So would you in this moment, by the power of your Holy Spirit, expose our weakness, expose our powerlessness, and would you by your Holy Spirit meet us there and heal that weakness and powerlessness? Will you have us embrace not just this A-shaped life but the V-shaped life that looks like the cross? Would you allow us, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to cling tightly to the cross of Christ so we might reign with him forever in the kingdom?

I pray for my brothers and sisters, asking that you would encourage them by the power of your Holy Spirit, that you would equip them, that the Word that has gone forth from Scripture would be like a medicine to their souls and a reminder that Jesus stoops low to be with his people in sickness and in darkness and in powerlessness. We say these things in his name, amen.