

What is the Happiness You Seek?

Series: Encountering Jesus (through the Gospel of Luke)
Brad Bailey – March 2, 2019

Luke 6:12-16

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Luke 6:17-19

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Luke 6:20-23

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Luke 6:24-26

²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. ²⁵ Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶ Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.

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Series: Encountering Jesus (through the Gospel of Luke)
Brad Bailey – February 24, 2019

Text: Luke 6:12-26

Intro

I'm excited to be together tonight.

For those who know my own journey...I first heard of Jesus ...about the same time I began to rebel against whatever seemed to conventional and vain to me. This made for a few interesting years... kicked out of one school...suspended from the next... but with a love for Jesus that I couldn't reconcile... tried to run from God. Finally...I offered up one last prayer...a deal with God.

He won.

Not proud... it is a journey to realize **there is one true rebel.**

Looking back I began to realize that **God has a place for rebels.**

God values that part of each of us that says something is wrong with this world...but then he must call us into the revolution of change.

He set something new before my life... and it called me. And my whole life I felt the call...it grabbed my life and I my spirit said "yes." I have never lost that calling. But like many of life's big questions... **it is still the question I have to answer.**

What are you seeking to make you happy?

Are you ready to be different...to live for something different?

That question called out a lot of lives during the **Jesus movement**... that had been a part of the Vineyard's early days.

And tonight, Jesus reminds us that this is the question for us all.

As we continue in this time of Encountering Jesus through the Gospel of Luke, The Gospel of Luke **meets us at a timely moment** this evening. It is the moment in which Jesus **chooses and sets apart** his core disciples and then gathers the crowds who are following.

Luke 6:12-16 (NIV)

*One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and **spent the night praying to God.** ¹³ When morning came, he called his disciples to him and **chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles:** ¹⁴ Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, ¹⁵ Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶ Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.*

In these few words we have **nothing less than the moment the ultimate cosmic revolution was coming into play.**

The Son of God is preparing to start a revolution.

I want to **note three phrases** in particular that **capture this moment**.

- **“spent the night praying to God”** – a moment which **God was initiating**
- **“...chose twelve of them”** – a moment which **inaugurated God’s new people**

We are told how Jesus prayerfully **choose the twelve** who would be **his core disciples... fully devoting their time to follow and be trained**.

Many note that the choice for twelve was **symbolic of Jesus creating the church as the “new Israel”** or more ultimate “people of God” as the twelve **paralleled the twelve tribes of Israel**. So this becomes a time of launching the new work of God’s kingdom coming. **He’s saying that, “I am building the new people of God and I’m going to lead them into the Promised Land.”**

- **“...whom he also designated apostles”** – a moment of **commissioning**

*An **apostle** in its most literal sense, is an emissary... one who is sent on a mission (The Friberg Greek Lexicon)*

One who carries something... bears a mission... and would impart that to others.

Those twelve would have the unique authority of initially being his chosen who could testify first hand. **But it is a word that would also be used of anyone sent out** to do the work of the Great Commission, and in that sense, **all of us are given a new mission in life**. So let’s **continue with what Luke records...**

Luke 6:17-19 (NIV)

¹⁷ *He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, ¹⁹ and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.*

The **power of heaven was breaking in....** bringing the signs of God’s will being manifest.

And now people were gathering to join him like never before... **“a large crowd of his disciples”...referring to far more than the twelve...and crowds from different places and backgrounds.** (A pictures so fitting of us gathered here this evening.)

And one thing we can presume...is that **they didn’t really understand what was at hand**. They knew that **God had to be at work**. But they **didn’t yet understand** how the **expected restoration of a righteous kingdom ...was coming**.

It’s something like a **first team meeting**. It was time to gather those **who have been responsive...to understand what is at hand**.

Jesus determines that it's time to call them together and clarify the calling at hand.

Imagine what they may have been feeling.

This isn't like anything on earth... **he is speaking for God...he is showing what only God can do...he is attending to everyone who has been excluded. Will he really let me be a part of this...let me join him? Will God bless my life? Now Jesus speaks to that question.**

Luke 6:20-23 (NIV)

²⁰ Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²² Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. ²³ Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

You can almost imagine the faces of those who stood their hearing these words for the first times.

Blessed are those who are **poor** ...who **hunger now**...who **grieve**...who are **rejected?** (You can almost hear some guy mumbling, "Say what?")

Before they could take this in...Jesus continued with the **converse woes**. If this was a challenge to what one sought for blessing... now he **adds parallel warnings.. with a woe to those who seek the opposite.**

Luke 6:24-26 (NIV)

²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. ²⁵ Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶ Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.

(Lord... may you give us the ability to hear these words with understanding and may they call deeply to us.)

These words **may sound familiar to some**. They are similar to the **more extended version in Mathews Gospel**...as part of what there is referred to as "The Sermon on the Mount." They have inspired and challenged countless lives...and leaders in philosophy and social change...including Mahatma Gandhi, Nietzsche, Freud, Karl Marx. [1]

These words rang out like the **sounds of a new world... because they were.**

Jesus is announcing **things are not as they seem.**

They leave any hearer trying to take in **what he could mean by such counter-cultural statements.**

Let me note a couple quick points that may **help us understand what he is NOT saying...**

It may be helpful to recolonize that...

These statements are...

- not simple categorical definitions or rules, but **“figuratively instructive truth.”**

Jesus is speaking in the form of hyperbole... a common way of speaking in striking pictures and contrast. He is declaring what we might best hear as **“figuratively instructive truth”... whose point is made in broad strokes not expounding in literal details. [2]**

In other words, it's **helpful to recognize** that they **don't define who** can be **categorized as poor or rich ...or how poor or hungry** do you have to be to be blessed? They don't intend to. **They are not intended to simply describe people in categories...but rather to reflect a general understanding** of what leads to knowing God's blessing or favor.

Secondly, it's helpful to recognize that **these statements are...**

- not simple causal statements, but rather they of speak of **general correlations.**

Jesus **didn't say** one is blessed **BECAUSE they are hungry**...as if to declare hunger as good in itself.

He is not stating that poverty, hunger, grieving, and rejection are good in themselves...and should be pursued as an end in themselves. [3]

So what is Jesus saying to them...and to us?

The first thing that Jesus wants them to understand...and for us to understand as well...is how to find a blessed life.

Whatever we believe is the blessed life...is what we will go after.

We all want to be blessed. We all want to have what we believe will be a blessing.

What we believe will bless our lives...what we believe will make us happy...what we believe will satisfy us...will define and direct our lives.

It will define what we seek most in life.

It will define what we find in life.

It will define what we bless as good in the life of others.

...what we will extol and extend to others.

And this world that Jesus came to **has become bound to what it perceives as the ultimate signs of blessing.**

The world was misinterpreting what reflected God's blessing.

At one point Jesus stops to engage a blind man, and his disciples ask, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" This is a strange question-how could he have caused his own blindness if he were born with it?

Generally in those days people believed in a cause-and-effect relationship between suffering and sin. Somehow it made people feel better if they could think that a suffering person deserved his suffering. When we judge people, we feel less of an obligation to suffer with and for them. When we judge people, we cease to pay attention to them.

That is why the **people so often walked right past those who Jesus stopped to care for**. They didn't see what Jesus saw. They saw those who must be cursed by God.

And Jesus needed them to understand that such circumstances do not reflect what brings or does not bring God's blessing.

What they needed to understand ...and what we need to understand...is that the gifts in life, when separated from the giver, do not reflect blessing.

What God tells us ... and is captured throughout the Scriptures...is that **we took the goods and became separated from the giver**.

Imagine this difference. If I have some valuable things... intended to bless my child... and give it as such...it would reflect my blessing...my favor. But imagine that someone breaks in and steals them...and then boasts about having them while denouncing that they were mine. In that case...even though they may have the same goods... they would not be a source of love...but rather of separation.

Let me summarize this point this way....

The symbols that are good in themselves... wealth of resources...fullness... laughter... and being well liked... are no longer signs of blessing in this world...because the gifts are now separated from the actual Giver... the means are now being made the ends...the goods have become the gods. These goods become the idols of our own vain false selves... forever separated from the love and goodness of life with God.

When we separate the gifts of life from the Giver... and make them serve our own pride...they are no longer a means of blessing...but rather a means of separation.

It is not that material goods don't still carry a form of blessing...but they are **only the rough remains of what they represented** when they were connected to the Father's home and heart. Now they merely try to satisfy the real blessing they represented.

Psychologists are studying what makes people happy...and it confirms that materialism simply does not satisfy. **University of Illinois** psychologist **Ed Diener**, concluded, "**Materialism is toxic for happiness.**" Even rich materialists aren't as happy as those who care less about getting and spending. [3b]

If they don't understand that the gifts in life, when separated from the giver, do not reflect blessing...they could not join in the blessing that Jesus was bringing...life with God made possible.

If they don't understand that the gifts in life, when separated from the giver, do not reflect blessing they will not be able to extend God's blessing to those in need. They would not be able to see that in the poor...humble... the hungry...the rejected...lies the potential to receive the true blessing of God that is at hand. [4]

If they don't understand that the gifts in life, when separated from the giver, do not reflect blessing ...they won't be able to follow Jesus...they will not be able to understand what awaits Jesus.

They may think that being with Jesus was a blessing because he was one sent from God like no other...and popular with so many...and they were attached to him. But things would turn. He would be crucified... hung on a tree which was the ultimate declaration of being cursed...but God had said that he would actually be exalted...blessed.

They will not understand what awaits them....and how to find the blessing in the midst of the hardship.

But the giver has come after us....and he comes to bring the blessing of life with God again.

Jesus knows that this world is not aligned with God's intentions...and the hardship it can bear.....but he knows the blessing of His Father in heaven...and the joy that means more than anything in this world.

The way our world now thinks about happiness...is deepening the disappointment. **The more we believe that money and power and food and amusement and popularity can provide anything more than a little ease...** we will be disappointed. And the **false expectation will carry over to the next purchase... the next meal... the next vacation... the next house and spouse...**and so on.

All of them presume that something outside us can satisfy what we long for within.

That is why Jesus spoke of what connects us not to some fleeting pleasure we call happiness...but to what brings blessing.

Jesus wants you to find the joy of heaven's blessing.

In the Biblical book of Hebrews it say,

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who **for the joy set before Him** endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. – Hebrews 12:2*

He had a connection to joy that scorned this world's shame.

What kind of joy is that?

As **Max Lucado** expounds,

Jesus embodied a stubborn joy. A joy that refused to bend in the wind of hard times. A joy that held its ground against pain. A joy whose roots extended deep into the bedrock of eternity.

What type of joy is this? What is this cheerfulness that dares to wink at adversity? What is this bird that sings while it is still dark? What is the source of this peace that defies pain?

I call it sacred delight.

It is sacred because it is not of the earth. What is sacred is God's. And this joy is God's.

Sacred delight is good news coming through the back door of your heart. It's what you'd always dreamed but never expected. It's the too-good-to-be-true coming true. It's having God as your pinch-hitter, your lawyer, your dad, your biggest fan, and your best friend. God on your side, in your heart, out in front, and protecting your back.
[6]

That is what we need.

That is what he extends to us.

In his final hours, he is in an **extended prayer** with God the Father, and he again **tells his disciples** that they **will face troubles**, but that says to his disciples,

John 15:10-11 (NIV)

*If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this **so that my joy may be in you** and that **your joy may be complete**.* [5]

The joy of this relationship is what is shared with us...and it has no limits.

Henri Nouwen

This is the secret of the joy of the saints...often suffering people who live today among great economic and social upheaval, but who can already hear the music and the dance in the Father's house. People who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness, but they choose not to live in it. They claim that the light that shines in the darkness can be trusted more than the darkness itself and that a little bit of light can dispel a lot of darkness.

Jesus lived this joy of the Father's house to the full. In him we can see his Father's joy. "Everything the Father has is mine," he says, including God's boundless joy. The joy of God belongs to his sonship, and this joy of Jesus and his Father is offered to me. Jesus wants me to have the same joy he enjoys. As

the returned child of God, living in the Father's house, God's joy is mine to claim.

[7]

That is the **inner joy**... it is the joy that comes with knowing God is with us.

Like the scenes of a dying man who reaches to the one sitting with them...and says...stay with me. The deepest longing is a presence with us. The blessed life is that which is united with God.

So **from the beginning to the end of His ministry** He is deeply concerned that His people, His disciples, His followers, would know true happiness, true joy, deep satisfaction.

Jesus wants you to be happy and he bears the joy of blessing.

If our hearts are primarily seeking the “blessing” we associate with wealth, being full in stomach, freedom from grief, and fitting in... we will find ourselves serving that which will leave us separated from God’s love and goodness.

Tonight, Jesus is calling us to choose what we want to pursue in this world.

What are you seeking to make you happy?

Are you ready to be different...to live for something different?

Many of us know that we have had God open up a new world to us... have heard it’s call...responded...but our hearts are not settled.

Many of us know that we are still trying to find a happiness in the goods that can only be found in the Giver.

In the betting world it’s referred to as hedging your bets’?

To avoid committing oneself; to leave a means of retreat open.

Many of us sense we are divided. We sense that we know that God is the source of blessing... and love ...and goodness...and that our real happiness is in Him.... but we are still trying to find happiness in the goods.

Jesus is calling us to find freedom in letting go of that false pursuit.

Jesus says: “Seek first the kingdom, and all these things will be added in due time.”

Seek the Giver...and trust him for enough goods.

The Scriptures describe as aliens... those who are citizens of a different country.

We have been trying to enjoy dual citizenship...and get the benefits of both countries... but **the Kingdom of heaven doesn’t accept dual citizenship.** [8]

Let’s take a moment in prayer...an opportunity to consider what we are seeking.

Resources: John Hamby “How to Live Successfully” (September 6, 2009); Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III - “Poor, Hungry, Weeping, Hated, Rejected...and Blessed!”; Dave Andrews article - “Let Your Light Shine”: Radicalism In The Sermon On The Mount.

Notes:

1. Quotes about the challenges of the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' radical demands

Marx asked professing Christians, "Does not every minute of your ordinary life give the lie to your theories [in the Sermon on the Mount]?" – second hand reference states cited by Bornkamm, Jesus of Nazareth, 222

Nothing else runs so counter to the original nature of man..” – Freud. Who then thought man must lower it's superego (restraint) to match it's resources as opposed to the Christian ethic of sugjugating one' s natural aggressive nature. – Sigmund Freud, Civilization and It's Discontents (1961; 61ff)

Friedrich Nietzsche believed that Christ lived a real life, a life that confronts conventional life. "Of what benefit is all scientific training, all critique and hermeneutic, when such a contradiction in biblical interpretation as that which the church maintains does not make one red with shame.? - Friedrich Nietzsche. "Der Willie zur Macht" (1901; 15:141

Gandhi

Gandhi and Lord Irwin, former Viceroy to India, were friends. On their return from the Round Table Conference at London, Lord Irwin paid a visit to the Mahatma in his ashram. During the conversation Lord Irwin put this question to his host: "Mahatma, as man to man, tell me what you consider to be the solution to the problems of your country and mine." Taking up a little book from the nearby lampstand, Gandhi opened it to the fifth chapter of Matthew and replied, "When your country and mine shall get together on the teachings laid down by Christ in this Sermon on the Mount, we shall have solved the problems not only of our countries but those of the whole world." - About Gandhi. Frank E. Eden, reporting what was related to him "by a friend who has traveled through India in the interest of mission work", in Treasury of the Christian Faith (Association Press, 1949), p. 43

Kurt Vonnegut

"Some of you may know that I am neither Christian nor Jewish nor Buddhist, nor a conventionally religious person of any sort. I am a humanist, which means, in part, that I have tried to behave decently without any expectation of rewards or punishments after I'm dead. My German-American ancestors, the earliest of whom settled in our Middle West about the time of our Civil War, called themselves "Freethinkers," which is the same sort of thing. My great grandfather Clemens Vonnegut wrote, for example, "If what Jesus said was good, what can it matter whether he was God or not?" I myself have written, "If it weren't for the message of mercy and pity in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, I wouldn't want to be a human being. I would just as soon be a rattlesnake." - Kurt Vonnegut, in God Bless You, Dr. Kevorkian (1999); in A Man Without a Country (2005) p. 80–81

2. The nature of hyperbole can be noted in Mathews long set of directives. Jesus states that if one lusts, they should "pluck out their eye." This like all his statements has an obvious use of making a point figuratively. The obvious truth is that one can be blind or close ther eyes and still lust. Similarly, when Jesus says that one rejected should "leap with joy"...we have no indication that

Jesus leap for joy when he was rejected. Nor did he ever seem to live as if he pursued rejection...poverty... hunger...or sadness. Nor did the early church ever seem to live as if he pursued rejection...poverty... hunger or sadness.

[3. Dallas Willard](#), most notably, in the fourth chapter of his "The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God" has proposed that the Beatitudes are not virtues or meritorious conditions. Rather, they are proclamations that the people before Jesus on the mountain are blessed (well off) because they are disciples of Jesus Christ. These proclamations are instructive in that they communicate to the hearers that many who are in a deplorable condition are blessed in spite of this because the kingdom of heaven has been opened even to them by Jesus Christ. [Alfred Edersheim](#) held a similar (or identical) view. He is quoted by Willard as saying: "It is not because a man is poor in spirit that his is the Kingdom of Heaven, in the sense that one state will grow into the other, or be its result; still less is the one the reward of the other. The connecting link is in each case Christ Himself: because He . . . "has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers." This interpretation relies on a view of Jesus' main message being the availability of the Kingdom of Heaven (see Mt 4:17). The Beatitudes then, are, according to Willard, "... proof that , in [Jesus], the rule of God from the heavens truly is available in life circumstances that are beyond all human hope." This interpretation sees the Beatitudes as continuing a biblical theme of status inversion in such places as the "Song of Moses and Miriam" in Exodus 15, the prayer of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2, the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, Jehoshaphat's prayer and battle in 2 Chronicles 20, and the "Magnificat" of the Virgin Mary in Luke 1. Also: Psalm 34, 37, and 107. Again, the inversion occurs, not because of a meritorious condition but in spite of it and by God's salvific initiative.

It has also been noted that there are references to such hardship being that which comes in relationship to following Christ.

Peter echoed Jesus' words in I Peter 4:12-13 "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."

3b. The article also quoted University of Michigan psychologist Christopher Peterson, who indicated forgiveness is the trait most strongly linked to happiness. Peterson said, "It's the queen of all virtues, and probably the hardest to come by." - - Citation: Marilyn Elias, "Psychologists now know what makes people happy," USA Today (12-9-02)

4. I believe that a fitting alternative for the word "poor" is that of "humble." The nature of "poor" seems clearly to transcend merely economic poverty, but certainly such economic and social poverty would correlate with the broader nature of being "poor in spirit" and standing. As one describes, "In Luke He says, "Blessed are the poor," but in Matthew 5 He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." So now we've moved past just external economics, and now we're talking about the state of the heart. So blessed is the man, happy is the man, transformed is the man, deep is the man who understands that he's spiritually bankrupt, that he has nothing that he can give to God as a barter for God's favor, for justification or for right standing. Because remember what Jesus said He quoted out of Isaiah, that He came to do? "I came to preach good news to the who? Poor." But He's definitely ministering to more than just poor people. So He came to proclaim

good news to those who were poor in spirit and felt like they couldn't do it, and that they couldn't get close enough to God and that they were broken and they were wicked. Now, this starts to make even more sense when you look at who gets enraged by the gospel message. ...how the Pharisees have responded to Jesus coming and preaching grace, preaching mercy, preaching love, preaching reconciliation.

God's justice for the poor is a topic which has led to various positions regarding its implications...and we are wise not to settle into a definitive understanding without having studied more of the Scriptures and teaching of Christ than the mere reference in this poetic beatitude.

Gabe Moothart notes this the strong theme of justice and care for poor throughout Luke: Mary's song of thanksgiving emphasizes God's care for the humble and the poor (1:46-55). Jesus, the son of God, is born in a stable (2:7). God invites lowly shepherds to His birth (2:8-20). The first story that Luke tells us about Jesus' ministry is that He declared that He was the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2: good news to the poor, release to the captives, liberty for the oppressed(4:16-21). The first disciples that Jesus calls are fishermen (5:10-11) and a tax collector (5:27). Luke's version of the sermon on the mount (blessed are the poor, the hungry, those who weep, the hated and excluded) is counterbalanced by woes (woe to you rich, woe to you who are full, woe to you who laugh) (6:20-26). Jesus declares that he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than John the Baptist (7:28-30). Jesus contrasts a prostitute's love with a Pharisee's, and judges the prostitute's to be greater (7:47). Luke makes special note of the women who accompany Jesus (8:2-3). Jesus teaches that to be His disciple means to follow him to execution (9:23-24). When the disciples argue over who is greatest, Jesus tells them that the one who is least is greatest. A widow's coins are worth more than the great surplus of the wealthy (21:1-4). Luke tells us that the Pharisees were lovers of money (16:14). They provides a foil to Jesus' extensive teaching on feeding the poor (14:13-14, 12:33) and giving up everything to follow him (14:33). Compare also, the rich young ruler (18:18-24), who was reluctant to sell his possessions and follow Jesus, with the disciples who "left everything" (5:11, 5:28). And of course the crowning example of this inversion is Jesus, the spotless lamb, being slain in place of the sinners who deserved His death. (From Gabe Moothart blog article (3/30/2010) "The Great Inversion in Luke")

A good starting place to reflect further on what Jesus wants understood regarding the poor, would be the story of the Rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-25) and judgment according to caring for those in need (Matthew 25:31-46.)

5. Also, John 17:13 (NIV)

Father...I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.

6. Lucado, "The Applause of Heaven," p.9-13

7. Henri Nouwen, "The Return of the Prodigal Son"

8. We are encouraged to focus on our eternal citizenship and position.

Philippians 3:18-20 (MSG)

There are many out there taking other paths, choosing other goals, and trying to get you to go along with them. All they want is easy street. They hate Christ's Cross. But easy street is a dead-end street. ... there's far more to life for us. We're citizens of high heaven!

Colossians 3:1 (NLT2)

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand.