A Tale of Two Worlds

Intro

- We live in two worlds separated by a thin line.
- Most of the time we live in what I would like to call “this” world, and sometimes we live in what I would like to call “that” world.
- This world is the world of the here and now where we settle for far less than we’d like, far less than we’d hope for, far less than what we’ve been created for.
- In this world, we worry as we stand in front of the gas pump, pumping $4.00 a gallon gas into a car we wish we hadn’t bought 3 years ago.
- In this world we juggle Happy Meal toys between kids on the way to and from soccer practice, dance class, school parties, and doctor’s appointments.
- In this world, we wonder when the next round of layoffs, price hikes, market declines, and car repairs will pop up.
- And in this world, we wonder if there is a place for us in community, if we are really loved, if we can trust, if we can recover from our past failures or if we will ever be at home inside our own skin.
- We all know about this mad world. The song articulated it very well, “I find it hard to tell you I find it hard to take when people run in circles it’s a very very mad world.”
- It is this mad mad world that can be so overwhelming at times that we forget about what life is really supposed to be about.
- I want to tell you today that there is a greater world, a better life that God has planned for us and that though the world of the here and now is what we all experience, it can become the shadow of a greater world.
- We all have an implicit hunger, a greater vision for our lives. It is this hunger for more, this vision that is at the heart of our hope for us and for our families.
- This hunger points us to another world, that world just beyond the one we experience in our day to day lives.
- In that world we aren’t afraid to risk, we don’t worry about tomorrow, and we gladly receive the simple blessings of today.
- In that world, we don’t think about whether or not we look good, smell good, are dressed right, or what others think about our hair or lack thereof.
- In that world, we celebrate people from different places and who look different from us. In that world, we care for the hungry, the slave, the sick, the hopeless, and the poor.
- In that world, we know what it feels like to be loved without question, to be held in such a way that the world melts away, to be told that we can do it and that everything will be alright.
- That world is a world we play and re-play in our minds all the time. Though it exists in our hearts, for most it is merely a faint and distant memory that we call childhood.
- From time to time, that world comes rushing back in vivid clarity when we visit an amusement park or Disney World or watch a fireworks display.
That world breaks into this world when we hear the chimes of the ice cream truck rounding the corner on a hot summer day.

We can smell that world when we stop to smell the butter cream frosting at the Sam’s Club bakery counter.

Many of us with children try to conjure that world up by giving our kids the best, giving them opportunities and experiences that will give them joy, excitement, to better their chances in this world and put a smile on their face.

For those of us who live in this area, wouldn’t you agree that this is the land of the child? All throughout this area, the image of a child could easily be our unifying mascot.

Baseball diamonds, Chuck E. Cheese, Zap Zone, parks, parenting groups, child care at the gym, Ikea, and coffee shop jungle gyms all are signs of just how important the world of the child is to us.

Even if you don’t have kids, children are intriguing for most of us. We study their words and movements because in their faces, in their smiles and laughter we see that world breaking forth into this one.

I want to tell you this morning that God invites us all back to the beginning.

God invites us to turn our world on its head, to make this world the shadow of that world, to live a child-like life and to embrace the blessing of beginning.

The Blessing of Beginning Comes from Being Touched by Jesus

- The blessing of beginning.
- It is the perpetual state of living out the best attributes of childhood.
- Innocence, wonder, and awe. Trust, security, and hope. Love and joy.
- The blessing of beginning is what God wants for this community.
- The first major thing we need to understand about this blessing is that it comes from Jesus Christ alone.
- The blessing of beginning comes from being touched by Jesus Christ.
- It doesn’t come from getting out from under your mortgage payment, keeping your job, doing well in sports, school, or in your business.
- The real blessing of beginning comes from being touched by Jesus Christ.
- To be touched by Jesus means that you have come to embrace him as he embraces you.
- Let me ask you this morning the most simple and most important question of your life, “Have you experienced the touch of Jesus Christ in your life?”
- Has your life been altered by a personal and profound encounter with the living Jesus Christ?
- The blessing of beginning comes when we’ve had such an encounter.
- In Jesus’ day, people had different problems. They weren’t concerned about back to school supplies and falling home values but their problems and concerns were no less real.
- They longed to live the good life for themselves and to give the best to their kids.
- In the epic story of Jesus, we read of a time where parents were bringing their children to Jesus.
In Mark 10:13-16 we read, “People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.”

What these parents understood and what Jesus affirmed is the most basic and simple truth of Christianity and that is that the blessing of beginning comes from being touched by Jesus.

These parents thought, “If I can just get Matthew to Jesus, Jesus will bless him,” “If Sarah can just receive Rabi Jesus’ touch, her life will be blessed.”

It says that the parents were bringing little children to have Jesus touch them and eventually, they get their wish and Jesus picks up each little child, lays his hands on them and blesses them.

I’m not a baby person. With their alien-like features, grunts and moans, and wrinkly unused feet-it’s like geriatric patients in reverse. I remember my two kids being under the age of 1 and it seems like all they do is cry, poop, and eat-don’t try to throw sleep in there because it just doesn’t happen.

After my first child, Kiren, emerged from this stage I remember vividly each stage from walking to talking to eating by himself to clothing himself.

At each step in the progression however, Kiren needed his mommy and daddy to teach him, to lead him, to encourage him-he needed the blessing of parental guidance.

Children need the blessing of parents-they need the protection and the guidance of adults who care for them and love them.

They can’t bless themselves-they can’t protect themselves, they can’t provide for themselves-they need others to bless them in every way.

These parents provided everything they could for their children but they could not provide the spiritual blessing that Jesus Christ could. Jesus alone is the source of true spiritual blessing.

We run to and from one thing to another, trying to give our children the best without realizing that the their most basic need is a spiritual need.

What we like them need most is the blessing of Jesus Christ.

Jesus throughout his ministry affirmed children, he championed them, using them as a picture of what that world, the world to come was going to look like.

Here he says that the children are heirs to the kingdom.

This word “kingdom” refers to that world that we are talking about today.

The Kingdom is that world where fears and sorrows cease, that world where we all like children dance and play without concern.

In the Kingdom, all the world’s ills are set right.

In the Kingdom, I love my neighbor from Bangalore without reservation. In the Kingdom, we care for the Earth instead of polluting it. In the Kingdom, we are connected to one another and connected to God in a way that is organic, unbroken, and beautiful.
• This vision of the Kingdom of God throughout Jesus’ ministry was so overwhelmingly important that Jesus hardly ever teaches without referencing it or alluding to it.
• These parents want the kingdom for their children and Jesus wants to give them this kingdom.

The Blessing of Beginning is Often Missed Because Of Our Mistaken Expectations
• The second major thing to understand about the blessing of beginning is how not to miss it.
• The blessing of beginning is often missed because of mistaken expectations.
• Mistaken expectations can catch us off guard and put us in a mental state of mind that will prevent us from seeing the most obvious facts of life.
• When you have assumptions that are incorrect in everyday life, you can experience great hardship and lost opportunities.
• When I graduated from college I went to work at an information brokerage clearing house here in the Canton area. I remember meeting Bill, the office manager, the first day after being hired by the owner to work as a field researcher.
• Bill was immediately kind to me, showing me the ropes, asking questions about my college experience and about my faith in Christ.
• It turned out that Bill was a Christian and even did some work with a very well known campus Christian group before coming to the firm.
• About six months into the job I was hitting my stride, outperforming many of my peers, putting in long hours, and attracting new clients.
• Everything was perfect and my expectation was to receive a promotion.
• Seemingly, overnight the owner however stopped talking to me. Instead he informed me that I’d have to talk only with Bill about business.
• Bill, however, also grew cold and unresponsive. This went by for a few weeks before I was called into the owner’s office. Bill stood by the owner’s side as I was informed I was being let go.
• I was confused, angry, and embarrassed. I was sure I was being brought in for my good work and perhaps a promotion but instead what I experienced was my first job termination.
• When I asked the owner why I was being let go he shared how Bill had caught me misusing funds, coming in late, and displaying a poor work attitude. Bill stood speechless and though I refused to acknowledge the claims I was asked to leave at the end of business that day.
• About a year later, I ran into the owner in a store and in tears he shared with me how Bill was let go some months after me. Bill had been caught lying about many of the things he accused me of and the owner was now sure that I had been a victim of Bill’s web of deceit.
• My position wasn’t available as the company had to cut back to recover from Bill’s mishandling of funds and I had moved on to another job but the point is this, “our expectations may not fit the reality that is right in front of our faces and when we are blinded to reality because of our assumptions, we can miss out on opportunities and experience hardship.”
• That is true in the workplace and it is true with our relationship to Jesus.
• These parents are coming to Jesus, wanting to have their children touched by Jesus, to be blessed by Jesus, but in this we see how easy it is to miss out on the true blessing of beginning.
• There are three groups of people who almost miss out on the blessing of beginning because of mistaken expectations.
• The first and most obvious group is the children. Because Jesus’ followers mistakenly assume that Jesus’ message of a new world is for adults only, they rebuke or discourage the parents from bringing their children.
• Children were seen as superfluous to the important issues of life. They had no place in commerce and politics. They had no rights and little impact on religious life. They were to be rarely seen and even more rarely heard.
• Jesus, however, flips this way of looking at the world and faith on its head and says not only do children matter in the grand scheme of things, but they are the very epicenter of the world to come.
• They will inherit the kingdom of God because they exemplify the ultimate intent of God, a world where the character and freedom of children rules.
• These children almost miss their blessing because the followers of Jesus try to prevent them.
• Let me just say here that often the greatest obstacle to experiencing the blessing of Jesus unfortunately is religion and religious people.
• I’ve been doing college ministry with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship for 14 years and I’ve seen countless ship wrecked lives because of religion and religious people.
• “I don’t believe in God because my parents shoved religion down my throat,” “I don’t believe in God because I was abused by a youth pastor,” “I can’t believe in Jesus because Christians don’t care about poverty, or the suffering in Darfur, or the AIDS pandemic in Africa.”
• As long as religious people in America continue to marginalize the world’s needs and those around them, we really don’t have to worry about the devil, his work is done.
• Religion has all too often pointed us away from that world, from God’s Kingdom, not towards it.
• The second group that almost misses the blessing of beginning are the disciples.
• Jesus becomes indignant which is another word for righteous anger.
• Jesus is brimming with anger at his own followers for getting it so wrong and he issues a warning.
• Jesus says, “…the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”
• For Jesus’ followers, they were certain they were a part of God’s coming Kingdom. They had given up everything to follow Jesus but they were missing the big picture.
• The vision of God is a Kingdom of children. Many spiritual people have a mindset of entitlement. They attend church, read their Bible, do good things but
they are bitter on the inside, jaded, and are missing out on the blessing of beginning.

- You know it doesn’t matter what you’ve sacrificed in the name of religion, if you aren’t receiving the blessing of beginning like a little child, Jesus says you’ll never enter into it at all.
- In what ways are you resisting the call to become like a child? Even though we all long to live in that world, I believe we all resist entering into it everyday.
- Often we see the resistance to this call to a child-like life is seen in the way we try to control the things around us.
- We try to control the way people see us and our families. We try to control our relationships. We try to control our emotions, our problems, our schedules, our finances, our food, our clothing.
- We are people bent on control and Jesus says just give it up. Just stop it. You can’t control it anyways so why torment yourself by pursuing the impossible.
- Live like a child. Give it all up to God and allow him to take the role of your Heavenly Father because He loves you.
- The religious people around Jesus almost missed it because of their desire to control, to control their destiny, to control one another, and to control Jesus.
- The parents almost missed the blessing too.
- The parents are the third group of people who almost missed the blessing of Jesus because they thought it was only relevant for their children.
- How like this is our lives? How often do we put our children on the merry go round, on the slide, how many times do we throw the birthday party without recognizing that the simple blessing of joy is also meant for us too.
- These parents just as much as their children needed the touch of Jesus and Jesus helps them to remember this.
- Jesus says, “…the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” He adds that, “Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”
- I want you to know today, that God knows the places in your life where innocence needs to be restored. God knows your fears and concerns—they are no secret to him. God knows about your tears in the dark, he knows about the anxiety in the pit of your stomach, and he knows about your broken dreams and unrealized expectations.
- More than knowing about it, he has a plan, a vision, a great world for us and it is a kingdom of beginnings.
- I want you to take a step of vulnerability with me today. Many of you have lost a job, lost a house or are in the process of losing one of these two things.
- Others of you or a loved one are dealing with a life threatening or altering sickness. Some here have had their homes broken by the crippling effects of a divorce, infidelity, or perhaps drug or alcohol abuse.
- Still others of you have been deeply hurt, you’ve been betrayed, neglected, wounded by someone you’ve trusted. Perhaps you’ve been hurt by the church, or someone you trusted deeply and you too need the touch of Jesus.
The good news is that Jesus desires to touch you in your deepest place of need, to bless you with a new beginning, but we have to reach out and receive it.

Right now, if I’ve just described you or there is some other significant issue in your life you’d like prayer for, right where you are, I’d ask you to take a risk and stand.

<<Invite people around them to lay hands on them and pray>>

The Blessing of Beginning is Available to All Who Would Receive It

We may not even know all that is involved or how deep and wide and awesome is this gift of beginning at first but we can receive it by just holding out our hands and trusting Jesus.

The blessing of beginning is available to all who would receive it.

The blessing of being touched by Jesus and living in that world isn’t restricted to some religious few but is available to everyone and anyone who would just reach out with child-like faith and receive it.

As a father, I want to teach my children about life and one of the most important things I’m responsible to do is to teach them is about finances.

I have a 9 year old son and a 6 year old daughter and we, once a month, sit down at the kitchen table and give them a monthly allowance.

The allowance they get automatically. We call it wealth sharing. They don’t do chores to get it, they get their allowance simply because they are a part of the Moore household. Don’t get me wrong, they do chores because they are Moore’s too but they don’t get an allowance from the chores, those are two separate issues.

We teach them that there are at least 4 things we do with money. We give to Jesus, we save, we invest, and we spend.

Now, not all of those squares are equal. We tell them that they get to give Jesus at least 10%, anything above that is up to them. So far, we are still at 10% but at least the crying has stopped in that square.

The saving and investing squares get 50% of what is left after giving and then the rest is for spending.

Now, because we only give them their allowance once a month, the allowance is pretty big. It’s $40 per kid. That’s way up from when I was a kid when $4 would have done but hey, the price of toys is up just as much as gas so what are you gonna do!?!?

Finally we try to teach them that there are also different ways money can flow into those 4 boxes other than mommy and daddy’s pocket book. They can work, they can invest, they can receive gifts—my daughter’s personal favorite.

Each month when we sit down, my son, the money man, carefully calculates his money and talks about who he can employ to carry out his business investments—I like to say that one day we’ll all work for Kiren.

Now my daughter is a different story. As the allowance has gone up, we’ve used larger denominations so each kid gets 2 $20 dollar bills. My daughter doesn’t know the difference between a $1, a $5, a $10, or a $20 so she always stands up and yells, “Look mom, a dollar!!!” We are working on her as well.
• I think there is a profound kingdom lesson to be found at that kitchen table every month that goes far beyond money.
• In fact, I believe money is so important in life because it is a surrogate for so many issues about faith and life, trust and risk, belief and belonging.
• God’s kingdom is a lot like this. Everyone gets the blessings of God simply because you’re God’s daughter. Everyone gets to share in God’s kingdom wealth. Yes, we all get to share in the responsibility of work of saving of investing of giving but the blessing of belonging has nothing to do with what you do but rather who you are.
• My kids are Moore’s. They are a part of the blessing of the home because of who they are, not what they do. Even if they don’t fully realize all I’m giving them, they get it because I love them and want what’s best for them.
• The blessing of beginning is like this. God loves you. He has done more for you than you will ever realize and you get to share in his wealth because you are his son, his daughter, all you have to do is hold your hand out with child like faith and receive it.
• You gotta receive it.
• Jesus says, “Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”
• There are many people, even though they are God’s children, who will never live in that world because they choose the path of control, the path of isolation. They resist God, God’s family, God’s vision for that new world. They don’t embrace the blessing of beginning but rather leave the blessing on the table and Jesus says the result is that they will never enter the kingdom.
• They will never know what it means to be free, to be forgiven, to be eternally provided for, or to experience connection with God and God’s people.
• I could give my kids all the money in the world but if they leave it at the table, the blessing is missed.
• God has given you all the love in the world, his eternal love through Jesus Christ. Are you leaving his gift on the table? Have you chosen the path of control or have you embraced the blessing of beginning?

Conclusion: The Blessing of Beginning is Available Now

• The Kingdom is that place where all things will be made right, made orderly, and made fair.
• The Kingdom is that place where all things are made restful, made lasting, made innocent, and made pure.
• Quite simply, the Kingdom is the reign of beauty, order, love, and belonging and it begins with Jesus Christ.
• That world is a place just behind the thin veil of this seemingly mundane life. That world is not found on a GPS and Google Maps can’t direct you to it. It is found only in the person of Jesus Christ but is available to all people and it is available right now.
• This is applied to our lives personally in the most profound way when we receive what Jesus has done for us by dying on the cross for our sins and rising from the dead in victory of our death.
• This is the real blessing of beginning because to receive this gift from Jesus allows for all the others to take on their full meaning and impact.
• You need to embrace it, to receive it and that can only be done by embracing Jesus and allowing him to touch your life.
• Why is embracing Jesus so important? Why did these parents think it was so important to embrace Jesus Christ?
• The reason why being touched by Jesus is the way we receive the blessing of beginning is because we need the forgiveness that can come only through what he has done for us on the cross.
• We are not merely sufferers in this world, we have broken relationships, we have hurt others, we have hurt ourselves, and we have turned our back on God and God’s kingdom.
  We have sinned against God and we need the forgiveness that only Christ can offer.
• The power of that touch of Jesus comes from the blood he shed on the cross. When Jesus died on the cross he died to open the door to beginning.
• The death of Jesus on the cross was the only way we could begin again because it was his suffering and his death that took the place for the suffering and death that we deserve as a result of our sin.
• The fact of the matter is that Jesus Christ is alive. He went to the cross, suffered, bled, died but rose from the dead in victory over sin and death.
• Because Jesus is alive, he has the ability to give you life, to restore what has been broken and to give you the blessing of beginning.
• That time is now. If you would like to acknowledge your need for the touch of Jesus, in just a moment I’m going to ask you to respond personally.
• Jesus longs to bless you, to take you in his arms and to embrace you but he says you must embrace the blessing like a child.
• I’m going to ask you to do something a little unorthodox today if that’s alright. If you are willing to embrace the blessing of beginning, to embrace Jesus and the community of faith this morning, then in just a minute I’m going to ask you to take one of the pinwheels you see on the lawn today.
• Is there any greater symbol of childhood of carefree summer days than the simple pinwheel?
• I’m going to ask you to take one of these pinwheels today as your way of saying, “Yes, I want the blessing of beginning. I’m ready to receive the Kingdom like a child. I want the forgiveness found in Christ. I want to be embraced by God today.”