

[BEZOS] This is Jeff Bezos. According to the latest information, he is the wealthiest person in the world. His total wealth is worth about 112 billion dollars. That is more than the yearly budget for the state of Texas, which serves more than 28 million people. [YACHTS] Jeff Bezos is among 26 billionaires, whose total wealth is greater than half of the population of the entire world. This other half now earns, on average, about five dollars and fifty cents a day. In the last 30 years, the average real income of the top one tenth of one percent of the world has grown 400 percent, to a billion dollars a year, while most others lost real income.

[BLANK] Love is patient. It isn't jealous, it doesn't brag, it isn't arrogant, and it isn't rude; but, also, love isn't happy with injustice; love is happy with the truth. And the truth is that, as Christians, we need to take an honest and complete look at how the love of God, which offers us saving grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, is more powerful, and more amazing, than all we can ever ask for, or imagine. In a world where power is in the hands of so few people, the world needs another way, the way of God's amazing love in Jesus, to save the world from itself. Because love that does not transform us, and God's world, into the image of God's love in Jesus, is not really love. We need God's love, a better way, in Jesus, more than ever.

Will you pray with me, please. [PRAYER]

June-Ann and I are kind of a geeky couple. I would guess that this is probably not surprising to you. One of the things that we share a passion for is outer space. How many wives out there sit down with their husbands and ask to watch videos of rovers on Mars with their husbands? Some, I guess, but probably not many.

[SATELLITE] So when the New Horizons spacecraft flew by the planet Pluto a few years ago, we were all in for taking a look at the first pictures from this satellite. Some scientists claim that Pluto isn't really a planet. But when New Horizons reached Pluto, the first photos showed an amazing world, as much a planet as anything we'd ever seen.

[PLUTO] And the most amazing thing about Pluto is that it had a heart - the surface of the planet had a heart shape, as clear as could be. It was like a love note from God, saying to all the universe, "I love you all, even lonely Pluto, in the middle of nowhere." No matter where we go, God's love is there. God's love never fails. [BLANK]

The Apostle Paul knew that God's love never fails. Paul's thirteenth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians tells us so. Paul had a call from God, not long after he had begun to spread the good news of Jesus, to visit far-away cities to share God's love. It wasn't an easy task. Many of the people he spoke to were very hostile. Paul was whipped and put in jail many times, as he visited the cities of Greece. Paul knew that love comes at a price.

Paul even tried to bring God's love to the port city of Corinth, where people of all kinds were interested mostly in more earthly types of love: love of money, love of selfish pleasures, love of power and might. You could look at a place like Corinth, and say, well, that's the way of the world, isn't it? Life is short, grab what you can.

And yet, this is the place to which God called Paul, a Jewish Pharisee, a man who

had helped to persecute and kill Christians as the way of the world. And then, Jesus came to Paul from heaven in a flash of blinding light. Jesus asked Paul to help Jesus to change the way of the world - even, and especially, in a place like Corinth. Paul was killing the good news of God's unfailing love for the world in Jesus, until God asked Paul to tell the world to always trust in God's love, no matter where, no matter what.

Paul's letter first calls the Christians in Corinth to clean up their act. They were all focusing on selfish ways. They were impatient during worship. They were arrogant when they should have been modest. They were unkind to others during their communion celebrations, ignoring justice. They abused their own bodies and other people's bodies, being hurtful, instead of caring for human dignity and worth. God's love was talk, but not a walk.

Even so, these early Christians in Corinth sensed the power of God's Holy Spirit among them. They wanted to move forward, thinking that one gift of the Spirit would carry the day. They were all wrong. The gifts of even the most humble people were needed in God's Spirit, as well as amazing gifts of apostleship, prophecy, words from the Spirit, and more. Every spiritual gift from God was needed among them, together, to find another way, a way that was better than the way of Corinth.

The better way is love. Love. It's a word that we love to hear. We love to be loved; though, if we are honest, we don't always like to love. There are many gifts that God wants to give us in God's Holy Spirit, gifts that endure, gifts that will go the distance. At the end of the day, though, only one gift of God in God's Spirit really matters. Love. [MIRROR] When we look in the mirror, do we see a reflection of God's love? Do we see God's patience, kindness, humility, and grace? Do we see what we want to see in God's world from God, reflected in us?

Maybe we do sometimes. Other times, maybe not. [OLD MIRROR] In ancient times, mirrors were pretty murky, at best. We have a hard time seeing the image of God in us, perhaps, because we have a hard time seeing how we are, and who we are, in general. We need God to show us who and how we really are, and other people seeking God to give us a sense of what God might see. And then, soon enough, there's a big reveal. We see it all. Will we be surprised? Ashamed? Amazed? No gift of God's Holy Spirit will prepare us better for that moment than God's love in our hearts, through faith in Jesus Christ.

[BLANK] I look at those 26 people, who, for some reason, thought that having billions of dollars was the most important part of their reflection in the mirror, and I wonder: what will they see face to face, in their time with God? We will face what they have to face, in our own ways, of course. We will all have a chance to meet the love that never fails, face to face: Rich people, powerful people, and people like us. In that moment, nothing will matter, except the love that we reflected here, and now, in Christ.

As I ponder my own future, and the future of God's church in Christ on this earth, I have to ask the same question: where is the love that will never fail? Where can it grow? How can I allow God's Holy Spirit to thrive in me, and to find the patience, the kindness,

the humility, the justice, the truth, to reflect God’s love in Christ, and to invite God’s world into it? Nothing else really matters, when it’s all added up. Nothing. It is the better way.

In Luke’s gospel, Jesus, the Son of God, and the Son of us, had only one comment to his friends and family after reading from the scroll of Isaiah in his synagogue: the wait was over. The perfect image of God’s love on earth was right before them. They were not seeing through a mirror dimly, but face to face with the love of God. At first, the people of Nazareth loved the idea. But then, out of God’s love, and God’s passion for justice, Jesus told them the truth: I didn’t come for you, people pleased with their reflections. I came for the people who had given up wanting to look at their reflection. Love is just. Love wants nothing but the truth. And the truth was that God wanted the people who had given up on truth and justice ever caring about them, ever favoring them, so that they, and everyone, could reclaim the image of God in them.

Part of me wanted to offer you a cute sermon on the Super Bowl, or whatever would delight you. For the record, I hope that Brady’s Bunch mops the floor with the Rams. But, like Jesus in Nazareth, like Paul writing to the Corinthians, I knew that I would not be just or truthful if I didn’t call you today to the better way that is God’s love in Jesus Christ, offered to us in God’s Holy Spirit. It is the only thing that we need to know, and to give. As I look at that half of the world outweighed by 26 humans, as I look at the amazing ways that our God of love has touched you, and our community, and God’s world, in Jesus, and as I look at what God has called us to create as God’s church in Jesus, there is only one thing that matters today, and ever: Love. It is the better way. It is the only way. Amen.