

# Enemies of Mission: Conflict without

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[ 0 : 00 ] The general title has been Mission That Claims Everything. And today we're on the second of the two on Enemies of Mission.

Last week we dealt with fears within, this week it's conflict without. I suppose if you wanted an alternative, we'd have to say it's Jesus' contrarian approach to life investment.

And I'll explain what I mean shortly. The Christian life and witness and the witness of church life often seems very hard.

And that's not because we perceive things wrongly, that's because it is often very hard. If it seems like being a disciple of Jesus means that life is much tougher than it is for those who reject Jesus Christ, well that's because sometimes, actually often, that is exactly the way it really is for now.

In this world. Now that may not be a great sales pitch for following Jesus. But actually it is Jesus' own sales pitch, if I can put it like that way.

[ 1 : 16 ] We've seen these last two weeks in Matthew chapter 10 that Jesus briefing for mission, that is the king himself teaching his ambassadors about their mission and what to expect in the world, that that is full of realism.

Now we noted that, of course, he's teaching the apostles, first of all. It's teaching to them, but nevertheless it is for us in every age of the church. And what his teaching is full of is hardship, persecution, and warnings about hostility.

That's a pattern to expect, Jesus says, always. Whether in your school, for a young person, or in college, or in your work, or wherever it is that you live.

Verse 16 will be true. Behold, says Jesus, I'm sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. So you must learn to have wisdom in your life and witness, as well as transparency and honesty.

You need savvy, that's what he's saying, otherwise you won't survive a month, let alone a lifetime. That's why he says you've got to be wise as serpents. Wise to the fact that there always will be opposition to gospel witness and gospel mission.

[ 2 : 32 ] Remember we saw that that will come, as Jesus says, from the religious establishment. Dead churches hate spiritual life. Even ossifying once alive Christians, sadly, become none too happy about missionary zeal, sometimes.

Comes from society all around us, the state and the society itself against us. It comes, even says Jesus, from family. There will be persecution.

And so it's not surprising that there are many things to bring us fear. We looked at that last week. Fear of slander. Making us want to be silent. Fear perhaps of violence and persecution.

Making us want to compromise. Fear even at times that God has abandoned us. That he's far away, that he doesn't care. So we saw last week, three times Jesus says, fear not.

God is true. Proclaim him from the housetops. God is great. Fear him. Don't fear those who can only kill the body. God is near. Trust him.

[ 3 : 35 ] He does love you. He does care. He is near. But, don't expect an easy life. This is discipleship. Because Jesus is clear.

The gospel always divides. Divides between faith. The people who say, this is wonderful. We've never seen anything like this. And unbelief. Those who say, ah, he's just doing all this by the devil. Jesus' gospel is about division. Jesus' gospel is about division. About sharp division. About sharp choices. Always. So not only is there always confrontation with enemies without, with the fears that we've talked about.

But also, always, there will be conflict with many things in the world. There will be a cost to be counted about Christian discipleship. And we must have our eyes open to the realities of the investment that Jesus is calling us to as his disciples.

And with Jesus, it's all straight. It's all there up front. There's no selling on commission. There's no mis-selling with Jesus. Not like the endowment policy that I bought when I was a student from Ensley Insurance Company.

[ 4 : 45 ] The man from Ensley, friendly to students, came to see us. Ensley, he said, could do me great things. You'll gather I'm not bitter about Ensley Insurance. Premised that not only when I bought a house would this pay off my mortgage, but above that there would be vast fortunes for me to spend in my beautiful new house.

Well, I cashed it in last year for a pittance. I thought I was the epitome of the prudent student. But obviously it's not enough, is it, to just be enthusiastic about the idea of investment.

You've got to be informed. You've got to be wise. You've got to be shrewd. So in verse 34, Jesus tells us the terms and conditions up front. Before we've signed on the dotted line.

The opposite from the way we do it. Nothing's changed. I was trying to buy insurance for my mother coming on holiday with us last week on the telephone. On the internet it was. And only after they'd taken the credit card details did the small print of the terms and conditions come up and tell us that it wouldn't cover all her medical conditions and all the rest of it.

But not with Jesus. No. You trust yourself to Jesus with your eyes fully open to the small print. Look at verse 34. Not peace, he says, but a sword.

[ 5 : 59 ] Not peace now. Not cheap peace. Pretend peace. Easy peace. That's what people's expectation was, wasn't it?

The Messiah. Messiah would be the Prince of Peace. Peace. But you see, real peace was far, far greater than the expectation of what people then wanted.

They wanted the Romans out. They wanted the kingdom restored now. They wanted peace in our time. And that's what people today want, isn't it? Many people think that that's what the Christian gospel is all about. Peace now.

Peace on earth. The utopia. The brotherhood of man. But you see, that's just fantasy. That totally misunderstands and utterly underestimates the severity and the depths of the problems in our world.

Ask anybody that's ever been involved in a so-called peace process in Northern Ireland or in the Middle East. Ask them and they'll tell you how desperately difficult it is, nigh on impossible, to achieve these things.

[ 7 : 05 ] Well, if that's the case, how on earth could you possibly expect to have peace on the whole earth? No. That can only happen if all the root problems of the world are utterly solved.

And the root problem of the world is not primarily man's inhumanity to man and rebellion against his fellow man. No. The Bible tells us quite clearly. It's far deeper than that.

It's man's enmity and rebellion against God. But that is the peace. A true lasting peace that Jesus came to bring. And that is a massive, massive undertaking.

And the reality is that peace only comes through destruction, through conquering of all the intractable enemies of God. The enemies of God's people. Jesus, the Bible tells us, came to destroy the works of the evil one.

To destroy his enemies and bring peace. And that's the reality that we know is true, isn't it? Real peace only comes when enemies are overcome. Either their minds are subdued and overcome.

[ 8 : 13 ] They forsake the foolishness of war and rebellion. Or, if not, then their bodies must be overcome by force. That's the reality about peace, isn't it? We see that in the world.

Pretend peace process just don't bring peace. Unless that's achieved. And the Bible says, no.

Jesus came to bring peace by the blood of his cross. To bring about a true cosmic peace. To truly defeat all the enemies of God and his people. And he has done that, Paul says in Colossians 2.

He disarmed rulers and authorities and put them to shame, triumphing over them in his cross. He has defeated the enemy command. That's what the Gospel tells us.

But the only way, the only way for those who have formerly been under the command of the enemy to come into the peace of the victorious king is for the enemies to lay down their arms, to lay down their hostility, to surrender to that victorious king.

[ 9 : 18 ] And of course, that's what rebels against God find such a very, very difficult thing to do, isn't it? Even though God offers peace, so many refuse that offer of peace.

They want to go on making war with God. Isn't that the world as we know it? And friends, you see, that will be the case right until the very end.

Until the very last battle of this war is over. Until the patience and the gracious invitation of God reaches its end and Jesus comes again to judge, as we sang in that psalm.

It's amazing, the grace of God, that he's so slow in his coming. Peter says to us, he's not slow. He's merciful, seeking all to come to repentance, waiting for people to surrender to his offer of salvation. And that's what this age is that we live in. It's the age of mission. It's the age of harvest, offering peace and gathering in those who will. But, this age of God's gracious mission and invitation is therefore always going to be an age of warfare.

[10:30] It's the gracious king himself offering peace to his enemies. Sending emissaries of peace into enemy territory to offer the terms of peace. But, at the same time, those emissaries constantly being put under sniper fire.

From those who would rather die than surrender to the truth. And Jesus is telling us in this chapter, isn't he, that that is the truth about his mission.

And Jesus has to teach us plainly about the cost in the now, in the time of that mission. The cost means that it's not going to be a time of peace.

It's going to be the time of a sword. It's going to be a time of division caused by the offer of peace. And that means for the king's ambassadors, and that includes you and me, if we're followers of Jesus Christ, all of us.

It means it's going to be hard. It means sometimes it's going to be very, very hard. And we need to know that. And to teach us in this last section of Matthew chapter 10, Jesus picks up on some of the examples he's already alluded to.

[11:43] And he shows us just how painfully divisive the gospel message will be in the world, and inevitably in the experience of some of his followers.

And it's going to be painful for us to hear this this morning. But Jesus teaches us because we have to hear it, and we have to come to terms with it, otherwise we'll never be able to be his followers. Jesus' mission, he says, is going to cost us everything. It's going to cost us everything, that is, that is invested purely in this world.

In order that, we may realize an investment that will prove to be the only investment, ultimately, that is worth having. On that day when all investments are liquidated, where everything is measured up against the gold standard of the King of Kings, the day of judgment when everything is laid bare.

I once read something from a famous investor, I think it was Warren Buffett, you know, the leader of the Berkshire Hathaway Investment Company. And he said this, he said that the biggest hindrance to successful investing is for people to separate themselves emotionally from unsuccessful investments.

[13:07] Perhaps things they've held for a long time and shift into a good investment. Or even to separate themselves from something that's been quite a good investment, to invest in something that really is better and the best.

And that's exactly the kind of language that Jesus is using in this passage, as he talks to us about something so much more important than just life investment.

Investment in eternity and in eternal life. And first he says that investing wholeheartedly in the mission of his kingdom will mean for his followers, will mean a painful separation from loved ones. Verses 35 to 37. What Jesus is saying here is that the ties of natural affection may be sorely tested even to the point of dreadful sadness and grief in this present age.

That may well happen and will happen to some Christian believers. But even then, Jesus Christ must come first. That's the painful reality of these verses and it is painful.

[14:17] Jesus says that the piercing sword of division will pierce families, will divide families. Because the gospel does divide.

It even divides the bonds of blood. It's a simple fact. Not in every family, but in many. Jesus says, literally, I have come to separate.

That word set against literally means separate. To separate father and son, mother and daughter, in-laws and in-laws. Isn't that hard?

Not that Jesus' purpose is to poison family relationships. Of course not. But simply that to accept him as saviour and lord and for others to reject him and despise him will inevitably bring a division. That's simply what we all know to be true, isn't it? It's very, very painful indeed. It's, I'm sure, very painful this morning for some people sitting here perhaps very raw.

[ 15 : 25 ] And verse 36 is a terrible thing to have to say, isn't it? A man's enemies will be those of his own household. Many of us can testify that that is true.

Maybe when a child is converted to Christ, a young person, the parents are furious. Maybe even want to try and stop them going to any Christian meetings. Might even threaten to send them away so they can't meet with the Christian group that's affecting them so dreadfully in their parents' eyes. Maybe there's terrible anger from parents when a young student is converted and changes their course of life from a lucrative career into something else which is driven by their desire for the gospel mission.

There's people this morning for whom that's true and it has put a division in their family. Or maybe when it's a spouse so reacts against your faith and commitment to Jesus Christ that they say to you, you must choose between Jesus and your religion and me and our marriage.

And there's people here this morning for whom that's true also. Or maybe it's a child growing up in a family of faith and at some point rebelling against the faith and the discipleship of their parents, their brothers and sisters.

[ 16 : 54 ] Turning away. Bringing the sword of piercing agony and division in a Christian home. That's true for some people here this morning.

And friends, there's probably nothing in the whole of life that is likely to be more painful for us to bear than that. And I know that some of you feel that most desperately.

But that's why we have to hear these words of Jesus right up front in verse 37. Whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

Whoever loves his son and daughter more than me is not worthy of me. That's a very devastating thing, isn't it? That may be the hardest thing that some of us ever have to hear in our whole life on this earth, I suspect.

I find it very hard to say these words. But it's very clear, isn't it? Jesus is saying it's either Jesus or our families in the ultimate sense.

[ 18 : 04 ] He's saying it can't be both. It can't be both, he says, because we can only truly worship one God. We can only be owned by or in service to or finding our identity from one Lord, not two.

And if we love and cherish even the closest earthly bonds more than the spiritual bond we have with Christ, that's not sharing affection with him.

It's idolatry. It's like having a mistress isn't sharing your love with your wife. It's hating your wife.

Now, few of us, few of us may have to make that choice in such a dramatic, ultimate fashion, but the truth is that in subtle ways we're having to make those choices all the time, aren't we?

Remember the other week we quoted John Calvin who said, the human heart is a perpetual factory of idols. It's very easy, isn't it, to make your marriage relationship, for example, actually an idol.

Remember Jesus' parable? He said, I've married a wife and therefore I can't come to your banquet feast. And that's true. Got to be careful. Don't misunderstand me.

[ 19 : 21 ] Jesus is not, repeat not, preaching that we should neglect our spouses for the sake of Christ and his kingdom. And that is a danger. It's a danger especially for those in full-time Christian work so zealous for the church, their flock, their mission, that perhaps their own wife and their family suffer.

And those of us who are in full-time Christian work need others to make sure we don't do that, to keep us up. That's not what I'm saying, not at all. But actually, the danger much more often today, I think, is in the opposite extreme, isn't it?

People talk about the need for quality time in marriage and that's right. For time away together, for leisure time, for all these things to help in one's relationship. They're all right, but it's so easy for those things to begin to drift us away from a focus on Christ and our true eternal relationship with him.

We've got to be careful. Is it your marriage first or is it devotion to Jesus Christ? The same can be true very, very easily in our families with idolatry of our children.

Again, do not hear me saying Jesus calls us to abandon and neglect our children. Of course not.

We have a duty to raise them and care for them and nurture them, but it is very easy, isn't it, for our children to become our idols.

[ 20 : 40 ] The place that we find our acceptance, our success, our meaning, our identity, their education, their achievement, their careers and all the rest of it. It can be the other way around in the idol of family expectation.

We can be enslaved to expectation of our parents or our in-laws, perhaps, to achieve, to please them. Perhaps, our devotion to the mission of Jesus Christ becomes sidelined.

But you see, what Jesus is saying here in this passage is that if the world is going to see the kind of devotion to Jesus Christ that will draw them to him, they must see the kind of commitment to Jesus Christ that speaks into a world an opposite, contrarian way of life that speaks so clearly of a devotion to something eternal, to the Lord Jesus Christ and him alone, that the world will take notice and sit up and see.

People have got to see that Christians and the Christian church loves Jesus Christ more even than the very closest things and the closest ones in our lives.

Do you remember Abraham? Remember God had given him that promise that the whole of his purposes for the entire universe would take place through his one son, Isaac, not through Ishmael, but through the child of promise.

[ 22 : 11 ] And what did God do? He asked Abraham to lay Isaac on the altar, potentially to give him up entirely for God.

And friends, that's what Jesus is saying here. It's exactly what he's saying. And in fact, the reality is that it's only when we can love him and trust him so as we can do that because we love Jesus more than all our other loved ones it's only when we do that that we can really be released to love them properly at all.

To give them the best love because it's costly love. Anything else you see, anything else that doesn't actually flow from love to the Lord Jesus Christ isn't really love in the biblical sense at all. It's just lust. That's the words, the Bible's word for just seeking earthly satisfaction for our appetites. that Jesus calls us to an eternal love.

My kingdom mission will test the closest ties of earthly affection. That's what Jesus is saying. Even, even in painful separation from loved ones.

[ 23 : 28 ] But I must come first. Second, he says, verses 38 and 39, that it will mean a costly separation from the world.

The natural ambitions of the present age, even the best of them, must be crucified, Jesus says. Because you can't be invested in this life and in the life to come.

Look at verse 38. If you don't take up your cross and follow him, you're not worthy of him. That means you're not a real follower, Jesus says. Verse 39 just clarifies what it means.

It's the opposite of finding life in this world. It's the opposite of grasping for self-fulfillment. No, says Jesus, it's the one who rejects that path totally for my sake, who finds life, who finds fulfillment, who finds satisfaction.

He's not just talking here about rejecting the bad things. He's not just taking, oh, you must avoid sex, drugs, and rock and roll. That's not what he's on about. He's talking about the very best things. He's talking about the pursuit of culture, of learning, of industry, the arts, sciences, good things, everything that is good and wholesome and right.

[ 24 : 43 ] Jesus is not saying you must be ascetics, rejecting these things for their own sake. What he is saying very clearly in verse 39 is you must turn your back on all of these things for my sake.

He's simply saying the same thing of our natural ambitions and desires as he says of our attitude to our natural family and loves in this world. He's just saying Jesus must come first.

You see, we've romanticized the cross, haven't we? This picture hardly means anything. We wear silver pendants around our necks. But no, Jesus is being radical. He's being stark.

He really means that there are many good and wholesome and right things that simply must be left to wither and die if we're really going to put him first.

And you know that's true, don't you? The reality is that today there's so much Christianity without a cross, isn't there?

[ 25 : 52 ] We follow Jesus until his cross gets in our way and life gets tough. We're maybe joyful and enthusiastic until the thorns and the thistles and the cares of this life come up.

So maybe we get the offer of a promoted job and that's a good thing. It's an excellent thing. But perhaps it's going to scupper our involvement with evangelism that we're able to do at the present time and that the Lord is blessing.

Or perhaps we have the chance to move to a new and a better house and again, there's nothing wrong with that. It may be a very good and necessary thing but perhaps it's going to take us away from the church where we serve and where we have a vital role to play with others.

And in the new place there's no prospect of any such thing. Or maybe you see we're a happy Christian a joyful Christian until well until some family concern arises like the above that we spoke about.

Maybe a child rebels. Maybe we're facing an illness. And you see the challenge of the cross comes into the path of our life and the question is do we pick up that cross as Jesus says.

[ 27 : 10 ] It's often true isn't it that we do pray just like Jesus Lord let this cup pass from me. Lord please bring me healing. Lord please take away this cause of grief.

Lord please sort out this terrible pain in our family. And we can pray like Jesus can't we but can we pray the next line yet not my will but thine.

I'm not finding this any harder than any of you are I'm sure but you see this is Jesus word to us this is the real challenge of his mission to challenge to you young folk at school who find it hard sometimes when people tease you about going to church and loving the Lord Jesus they poke fun it's a big challenge to you teenagers it's going to be a bigger challenge when you leave home and go to college and university but are you willing to take it that's the question that's that's what Jesus is saying whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me he's not really one of my followers but that's the power of mission you see Paul says when he writes to the Philippians I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and we all say yes so do we of course but what does that mean says Paul it means sharing now in his sufferings becoming like him in his death that by any means possible

I may attain to the resurrection of the dead you see that kind of costly separation from the world that kind of detachment from this present age is both the way to resurrection power in our mission and life now and and the way to resurrection glory at the last whoever loses my life loses his life for my sake says Jesus will find it that's the only way and that brings us to his final point here the life of mission of the kingdom is not just about painful and costly separation although it most certainly is it's also about and indeed it's totally overshadowed by what Jesus speaks about in verses 40 to 42 a privileged union with the saviour himself maybe a separation painfully and costly from the world but it's a union with him that is utterly privileged investing your life totally with Jesus now he says brings not just an extraordinary privilege now but also a wonderful reward forever

Jesus is realistic about the cost and indeed the costly separation from this world and from cherished loved ones now he is just as realistic and just as open and encouraging about the enormous privilege of what it means to be his disciples this is not for nothing he says it's for my sake and that changes everything that transforms everything in our experience because we don't just have the joy of sharing now in Jesus' mission being so closely united to him that our words are counted as his words but we also have a promise of eternal reward but isn't this striking in verse 40 whoever receives you receives me and receives the father I think it's Chris Patton in his autobiography speaks about the years when he was the governor of Hong Kong put there by his friend

[ 30 : 53 ] John Major and John Major said to people when you speak to this man you're speaking to me and when he speaks you're hearing me speak and that's what Jesus is saying in verse 40 and so verse 41 is true anyone who receives somebody that speaks in Jesus' name is rewarded as though they were receiving Jesus himself isn't that extraordinary anyone who receives a righteous person that is someone who loves Jesus' words and follows him is rewarded as though they're receiving Jesus himself anyone even dealing with the least of his disciples these little ones just because they're Jesus' disciples doing something for them a cup of cold water was the minimum courtesy in these days it deserved no reward it went without saying that you would give somebody a cup of water but Jesus says even somebody who does that tiny thing to the least of my followers it'll be viewed as though they're doing it directly to me isn't that a wonderful encouragement to all of us that everything that we do for Jesus' sake on his behalf is received and seen by heaven as if it was

Jesus himself doing that very thing all our talk about him our evangelism the things we try and say to friends and family who don't know the Lord however feeble and stuttering however wrong we get it it's just as though Jesus was speaking and all that we seek to do for Christ's people to help them in their ministry and mission is directly for him and for his personal glory and he won't miss it it'll be rewarded anyone who does it to a prophet to a righteous person someone who stands for Jesus he's not talking about wages he's not talking about something we earn by doing this he's talking about reward it's his grace that totally outgives us every single time that brings us to the final thing not only says Jesus here do we have the privilege of giving to him now and representing him now

we have a wonderful reward from him promised forever do you see it three times in these verses he will receive his reward he will receive his reward verse 42 he will by no means lose his reward it couldn't be stronger remember Jesus is talking here about investing not just for the long term but for eternity look back to verse 15 he's very clear about a day of judgment coming look at verse 32 and verse 33 he's talking about that day when everything is made public and when God acknowledges before the world those who have confessed him now that's going to be the open and public verdict of everything that's been confessed already now in our own lives and following him and in other words what Jesus is saying here is quite striking on that day that day of judgment our identification with Jesus now will be unveiled to be one and the same thing actually as our reward that we receive then sometimes people get in a terrible pickle when we talk about rewards in the Christian life they think well what could be what could be more of a reward than being in heaven surely there can't be greater or lesser rewards that sounds like merit and earning things surely just being in heaven with Jesus is all there is well yes and no depends how we think about rewards we tend to think about rewards in an arbitrary sense you know to say your child look if you behave well you'll get pocket money on

Saturday or do your piano practice till the end of the year and you'll get a special prize maybe a new bicycle for your birthday or something like that but that's not how the Bible thinks about rewards C.S. Lewis is very helpful he says that reward in scripture is the thing itself in its fulfillment in other words it's not practice the piano every day and you'll get a new bike in the summertime for your birthday rather it's practice the piano every day and one day you'll be able to play Mozart and Beethoven and Brahms and that itself will be the reward you'll be able to enjoy the music that is the climax of the thing itself and so Jesus you see is saying live so much in separation from the world now and united and identified with Jesus now and on that day when he comes you'll realize that being united like that forever with him is the reward you see if you love and cherish your fiance now when the time comes for you to be married your married life will be full of rewards if you cherish your wife and love her in costly separation from all others forsaking all others and keeping you only unto her as long as you both shall live then you'll reap the reward of a wonderful and happy and fulfilled marriage and that's just the way it is with Jesus that's what he's saying and that's the wonderful encouragement at the end of this chapter of very straight and sometimes very difficult honest teaching about mission the fact that it claims and costs us everything in the end what seems to the world and what sometimes seems to our worldly minds to be nothing but cost in the end that will be revealed to be itself the pearl of great price the only thing worth having that's life with Jesus that's union with him and his great kingdom mission it's a totally upside down contrarian approach to investing in life but in the end it will be proved to be absolutely true

I've got a friend who's a fund manager in the city of London his whole approach to investment is contrarian in fact he would say it's because he's a believer and he gets it from scripture but he invests in stocks that are currently rejected by the rest of the market and so most of the time the investment world laughs because he's not buying dot com bubble stocks although they don't know it's a bubble he's not buying the latest flavour of the month he's buying the things that seem out of favour and boring and mundane and dull but every year when the investment awards come around he is the top fund manager in his sector for one year and three years and five years and ten years why is that?

well it's not because of luck it's because he knows how to invest in value it's not that he's holding something of little value that suddenly gains value and becomes popular later on and his fund goes up no it's not that rather he sees what other investors cannot see for the time being he sees something that is even now of enormous value but is being neglected and overlooked and rejected despised and forgotten and therefore he is certain that one day all will be revealed and at last everyone will see the value of what he has bought and there will be a mass re-rating and the value will go up but of course on that day it's too late for all the others people will try to pile in at the top of the graph and it will only go down and that's exactly how it is with Jesus Christ and his offer of the gospel it's very simple there's no soft sell there's no sales pitch quite the opposite as we've seen but he is offering value that is infinite and lasting it's something that is hidden to the world it's something that is despised and scorned and it will cost you everything you've got to invest in it but for those who do there will be the joy and the privilege and the wonder of loving him and serving him and speaking for him now all throughout this life however hard it may be but also says Jesus

[ 39 : 52 ] I say to you truly he will by no means lose his reward that's the investment that Jesus puts before us that's the cost of following him it's the cost of his mission but one day the cost will be

seen to be the reward Jesus says whoever whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it well we're going to receive our offerings now and there's a few moments of quiet for us to ponder these words that we've heard from Jesus really never I never you today we're Bondi I Je-

I he- I I Jesse Did I tell you another kingdom of course in the uma■■ who agree as