

But Seek First His Kingdom...

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Date: 02 January 2022

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[0 : 00] Turn with me once again to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 6, and the text that we'll be focusing on this evening is found at verse 33.

Matthew chapter 6, verse 33, which reads, But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

And when Colin, our minister, first phoned me up and asked if I would do the evening service, I said to myself, I wonder what the Lord would have me bring.

And then my mind started thinking around the lines of what would be a good, snappy, biblical principle and truth to take with us into 2022.

And it is something when I was a minister up in the Highlands and in central Scotland that I used to do at the New Year, something like what I'm doing this evening and what I did today.

[1 : 33] Because after all, this New Year is stretching before us, and none of us know what a day might bring forth. None of us. Never mind a day and an hour.

And it's good, is it not, for us to have some kind of, one might almost say, re-consecrate ourselves at the beginning of a new year.

And I believe that this great text and truth might be as good as any for the purpose that I feel I have in bringing those services both this morning and this evening.

This text is a summary, not only of the immediate context, but it's really a summary of the entire Sermon on the Mount.

And the reason I say that is because it brings, it captures, I should say, the two great themes of the sermon. Just you read the sermon slowly, thoughtfully yourself, chapter 5, chapter 6 and chapter 7, and see if you can see that conclusion.

[2 : 57] The two great themes of the sermon are the kingdom of God. When Jesus first opened his mouth, the first thing that came out of his mouth was, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

That set the keynote for the entire sermon. Righteousness. Remember when Jesus went to be baptized of John?

This is all in Matthew's gospel. It's in the other gospels as well, but I'm thinking of Matthew's gospel. When he went to be baptized of John and John says, I shouldn't be baptizing you.

What did Jesus say? Let it be for now. We need to fulfill all righteousness. Righteousness. Did Jesus not say in another beatitude, blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness? Did Jesus not say again, blessed are they that are persecuted for the sake of righteousness? Did Jesus not say, except your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, you shall in no way enter into the kingdom of God?

[4 : 15] Did Jesus not say in chapter 6, take heed that you do your righteousness or your righteous acts, not before people for their honour, but make sure you do them for God.

So I want to suggest to you that this verse captures the two great themes of the Sermon on the Mount. Essentially, I want to speak about two things this evening.

wrong-seeking, wrong-seeking or seeking in the wrong order, and right-seeking and seeking in the right order.

Jesus said in verse 32, I'm just looking, that the print is so small, this is the one challenge I have when I'm in the pulpit.

For the Gentiles seek after all these things. Now, I want you to notice that. And the reason I want you to notice that is, Jesus is very, very aware that one of the characteristics of a human being is that they seek things, that they're always seeking something or someone.

[5 : 49] They seek love. They seek relationships. They seek a life partner to share their life with.

They seek acceptance. They seek identity. Look, you know what I'm saying. I don't need to list anymore.

Jesus is fully aware that people seek for things. Did Jesus not say, if anyone thirsts, let him come unto me?

So that's the first thing I want you to notice about this verse. Jesus is well aware of human longing and human thirsting.

I've mentioned this before, but Nick Cave, the Australian singer and poet and film maker, in one of his songs, his more ballad type songs, he talks about longing for something we do not know.

[7 : 05] Longing for something we do not know. And Augustine, we've heard this before, but it is, he captures so much, Augustine, does he know, in that famous phrase, thou hast made us for thyself love, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

The key is, his first statement, you have made us for yourself, we are made in the image of God. The seed of the image of God is within us.

A longing for something I do not know. I am looking for something and I think I'll find it in this, that, or whatever, drugs, sex, anything.

But beyond and underneath all of that, there's something else going on. seeking in the wrong places and seeking for the wrong things that cannot satisfy our deepest needs of human, as human beings.

And the reason that they cannot satisfy our deepest needs, though, listen, if you, if you end up talking to celebrities, especially as they got older or famous people and everything else, do you know what you find nearly every one of them saying, the thing that has really, I've got most from is my family.

[8 : 55] In other words, something relational, something that's close to them. You see, made in the image of God means that our hearts are God-shaped.

There's a statement in the scripture somewhere, isn't there? God has put eternity into our hearts. Nothing less than God can remove that or quiet that restlessness.

So, if you're aware this evening of a longing for something you do not know, can I suggest that you make a move towards Christ?

Can I suggest that you hear the words of him who says, if any person thirsts, let him come unto me? Can I suggest that you listen to the one that once met a woman drawing water at a well and Jesus had been walking for miles in that hot climate of the Mediterranean and Israel and he was dry and needing water and then he got involved in a, you might say, religious conversation with her and he said this during that conversation.

He was asking, he was wondering if the lady would give him a drink drawing from the well but then he said to her, if you knew who it is that's standing talking with you, you would have asked me for drink.

[10 : 38] Yes, so if you have that sense of longing, that sense of restlessness, that sense of looking for something, that sense that you're not whole.

I remember at one time, I can't remember exactly when it was but shows you that I like listening to some of the things that my kids like listening to and I like to find out what their tastes are in music and different things.

And Atomic Kitten, I remember this from years ago, make me whole again.

And that was the lyric actually that caught my eye or my ear. Jesus is so aware that people are seeking.

seeking. But Christians are also seeking and Christians are to be seekers all of their life.

[11 : 48] Because let me just elaborate on that last comment about Christians are to be seekers all their life. Remember, the audience that Jesus is speaking to is his disciples and a crowd of other people.

And you could say they're people that are certainly interested in listening. They're not disciples of the kingdom yet, but they're interested in listening.

But you might say that Jesus is firstly addressing his disciples, but secondarily he is addressing the whole crowd. And I want you to listen to the language of this verse 33.

Notice it begins with but. That's the first thing you have to notice, which indicates that he's talking about an alternative in this verse to something he's already been talking about and the something he's already been talking about is worry, anxiety, oh, wow, now, that is contemporary, is it not?

But I want to just issue, well, no, I'll continue with the language first, and then I'll go on to see a bit more about that. So the first thing is notice the but. the second thing I want you to notice is the word seek in the original language is an imperative and it's a present imperative.

[13:40] Sorry for that technical language, all it means is it's critical, it's urgent, your life depends on it. And because it's present in the Greek present tense is a continuous present tense, keep seeking the kingdom of God, never give up seeking.

And notice the word first, so I've said to you, watch the language, but starts with a conjunction, watch the verb, the imperative active, present, and it's us it's to seek, it's not a passive, it's an active.

And notice this word first, it not only means first in order, first, second, third, fourth, fifth, yes it has that meaning, but it's got a deeper meaning, it means the principal thing, the main thing, the big thing, the thing that can transform your life, if you put it into practice, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.

worry and anxiety being sucked into a vortex of worry and anxiety that results in our inability to focus on the kingdom of God that affects our spiritual vision for Christ.

now that, what about this word in the Greek that is translated in the English as either worry or anxiety?

[15:31] Well, here I want to issue a disclaimer. This, in my view anyway, is certainly not talking about clinical anxiety.

Clinical anxiety is a medical disorder that is caused by various causes, different causes, both physiologically, chemically and so on, as well as externally, as well as circumstances, as well as personality.

It's a complex thing. As you know, I worked in a health centre for five years between 2013 and 2018 and I worked with the mental health team and the GPs and I saw 500 patients a year and one third of them presented with mental health problems.

mental health qualifications as well as mental health qualifications as well as experience.

But look, first of all, anxiety, general anxiety is normal.

[16:59] That's the first thing that everybody must realise. to be anxious about different things is to be human. And it's not that kind of a clinical anxiety is not that.

if you're walking home as a young woman and you suddenly discover that there's somebody that seems as if they're following you and it's dark at night and you're alone, if you felt so relaxed and not a tinge of anxiety that would be really bizarre.

there's another side to this. I just want to I'm just throwing these things out.

Some people feel that an awful lot of our humanness is being medicalised when it doesn't need to be. There could be some truth in that as well.

But I think Jesus is just talking about the worries of everyday life and how they somehow or other can begin a take over us and become too much and become overwhelmed about them.

[18:26] And I don't want to I know all about the immediate context which is all about worry. A good number of verses all about worry that I don't want to spend a huge amount of time on it.

All I want to say is this. One of the statements within these verses that I personally find so helpful is your father knows that you have neither of these things.

I really find that very, very helpful. Your father knows. In fact, so helpful that sometimes I'm a wee bit kind of not the biggest fan of list prayers.

Not the biggest fan of articulating every single thing to God. Your father knows that you have need of those things.

Do a wee exercise. Look at all the prayers of Paul in the New Testament in every one of his letters. You'll find that they're nothing like the lists that we pray. The right kind of seeking.

[19:45] So there's a wrong kind of seeking, there's a wrong kind of worry, and there's a right kind of seeking. Seek first the kingdom of God.

make that your main driving principle in life. Make that the thing around which everything else revolves.

so I want to at this stage ask the question, what is this kingdom that we're encouraged to seek first before all else and to keep on doing that?

What is this kingdom? Jesus once said this to Pilate. You'll remember, now this is, when we talk about what I'm about to say, it's, you know, that the last hours of Jesus is before this Roman

governor called Pilate, and they're in conversation, and Jesus at one point in that conversation says this, my kingdom is not of this world.

Seek first the kingdom of God. So there's the first thing we can learn about the end of this world. it's not like the kingdoms of this world that rise and fall.

[21 : 18] It's not like the once great British Empire. It's not like the once great Roman Empire. Indeed, it's not like any of these kingdoms.

the writer to the Hebrews puts it like this, speaking of believers, Christians, he says, we're receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

This is God's kingdom. This is an invincible kingdom. But more than that, this kingdom of God that Jesus announced and launched himself, on the sandy streets of Jerusalem and Galilee, is the great project God has planned and provided for a fallen human race.

Because all the kingdoms of this world are weighed in God's scales and found wanting. The kingdoms of history, today, the kingdoms of today, Jesus officially launched the great project of God regarding the kingdom of God when he came into this world.

And because of that, that means that the kingdom is present. It's here. Jesus could say, the kingdom of God is among you.

[22 : 57] the kingdom of God is wherever Jesus reigns. The kingdom of the Lord, you can't get a world map out and place it down here and say, well, there's Australia and there's some other place and there is the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God in that sense is not a specified piece of land. It's not a geographical thing. It is the reign of Jesus Christ and those that have come to him with that longing and received him and the kingdom that he offers as their salvation.

How did Jesus secure this kingdom? He certainly didn't secure it by brute force or pogroms or masculines but by a power greater than all the world's power put together namely the power of God's everlasting love.

My kingdom is not of this world. How did he win that kingdom? The kingdom of God. The kingdom that cannot be shaken.

The kingdom that is not of this world. The kingdom who has the king of the called Jesus Christ and the kingdom that is telling us to keep seeking after.

[24 : 35] Seek first this kingdom. How did he win it? He won it by surrender and submission.

where did the decisive victory take place for this kingdom?

Battle of Somme, Battle of the Bulge, one of the great battles of Julius Caesar, slaying hundreds of thousands.

kings. Where was the decisive victory for the kingdom of God, Golgotha? a crucified saviour hanging, disgraced and shamed and mocked and ridiculed?

I'll tell you, that is the greatest victory of the biggest battle that history has ever seen.

[26 : 01] Paul puts it this way, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Do you know what I'm trying to do just now?

I'm trying to inspire the greatness of our salvation and share that with you. Listen, our salvation is far bigger than oh I'm saved, I've got an insurance policy, I repented and I'm saved.

God's project is far far bigger than that. That's not an end even in itself. The end is that we might be conformed to the image of Christ, that we might share as Jesus puts it in John 17 in the glory of God, that they might be in us as I am in you.

The Greek Orthodox churches call that deification. We don't need to call it that if we don't like to do that. But the point really is so great salvation said the writer to the Hebrews.

[27 : 33] Let's as we enter 22 remind ourselves of how great that salvation is. And there's more because Jesus Christ is coming again.

But before I say any more on that as we are just about finished, can I ask you, do you know him?

Those that are listening in in Zoom, perhaps there's somebody listening in there and you've wondered what the coming of Jesus Christ was all about. I've tried to articulate that.

It was the great project of God and bringing the kingdom of God to human beings and asking them to enter into that kingdom and find glorious salvation through Jesus Christ.

But you know he's coming again. We hear a lot about climate threat. And of course, that is something I believe that Christians should be at the forefront of because God placed us in this garden, I mean this earth, that we should look after it and that we shouldn't exploit it which it has

been throughout history, mainly for greed and profit.

[29 : 25] He's coming again. And here's what he says, behold, I make new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness.

Now, I've no time now because the time is up. Notice it says, but well, so that you can look at it yourself, notice he says, I've only commented on one of the themes and I haven't commented on the other, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Very quickly, the thing that you need to notice here is that pronoun, personal pronoun, his righteousness, not mine.

not any human genius coming up with some sort of answer to righteousness in the world or even in their own life.

No. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. righteousness. That is not limited by any stretch of the imagination to justification.

[31 : 04] That righteousness that we are being asked to seek here is as broad as God because it's his righteousness.

righteousness. In the Old Testament righteousness is a massive concept and it virtually has three aspects to it apart from the fact that when it's talking about righteousness in the Old Testament all of that righteousness wherever it is seen its source is God.

First of all it's got a relational dimension. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself renewing that relationship healing that broken relationship.

It's also got a dimension justification of right standing or status. That's the one justification and we love to it's a wonderful precious truth and we love to keep our focus on that and that is absolutely fine.

It's only part of it. right and it's got right living. I'll give you another exercise to do.

[32 : 39] Read through the Psalms and watch out for this. God I'm praying to you on the basis of my righteousness. We dare not be I don't hear anybody ever praying like that.

Lord you know my righteousness you've seen it. What the Psalmist means is the righteousness he's talking about is the righteousness that God has revealed the way that he is God is saying the people should live the kind of ethics if you like that they should be following but sometimes the Psalmist is so sure that they've been following living that right living before God in faithfulness to them that they're able to use that in their prayer.

I finish by turning the spotlight to the great seeker Jesus Christ.

I began this sermon by saying Jesus is very aware that human beings this is what they this is part of their DNA they long for something they do not know they're seeking for something that's bigger than themselves they know not what very often especially in this day and age but Jesus said I came to seek and to save that which was lost he starts the seeking there is 2022 may God give us the grace to take this great truth into 2022 but not withstanding and many of these things that are before that but are valid and legitimate he's not saying for a moment that these things are not needed or that they're bad or anything else he tells them your father knows you need them but the critical thing is to get our relationship dare I say

I don't really like the terminology our vertical relationship with God sorted out first then all these things will be added to you may the Lord bless these thoughts for each one of us and for his glory go