

Seek the Kingdom First

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[0 : 00] Matthew chapter 6. And this morning our attention will be directed to verses 19 through 34.

! Matthew chapter 6, starting in verse 19. I'm wondering, if you've looked in the bulletin, I did indicate verse 25, but as I studied, I saw that really the foundation of what Jesus says in verses 25 through 34 is found in 19 through 24, so I decided we would start there this morning.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body, so if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light.

But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

[1 : 52] Therefore, you cannot serve God and money. Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on.

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns.

And yet, your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more? Are you not of more value than they? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life?

And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin.

Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

[3 : 16] Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, what shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or what shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek after all these things.

And your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Let's pray. Father, we're so grateful this morning that we're gathered in this place on the first day of the year, on the first Lord's Day of the new year.

And, O Lord, I pray that you will speak to us through your word this morning. I pray that this word will truly be a foundational word for us as a church and in our personal lives.

[4 : 23] I ask in this moment that you would give us all ears to hear. I pray you'd give us hearts to obey. Lord, may your word fall on good soil and bring forth fruit in all of our lives.

I trust you for your grace to be faithful, to proclaim your truth to your people. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. These words of Jesus that we are considering this morning were spoken by him in the Sermon on the Mount.

And the Sermon on the Mount can be rightly called the constitution of the new covenant people of God. Because it lays out a new vision, a new way of living, that Christ calls his disciples, those who trust him, those who will follow him, to live by.

And so I think it's important for those of us who belong to Christ to seek to know and to live out the values and the standards of the Sermon on the Mount.

And one of the realities that we see in the Sermon on the Mount is that as people living in a fallen world, we do not naturally have the things of God and the priorities of God as priorities in our lives.

[5 : 47] We don't do that naturally. We're fallen people in a fallen world, and those things are very far from first in our lives. And this is the point that Jesus is making in these verses.

And so he issues this call to those of us who would be his disciples, and he calls us to live differently.

And here's how I would summarize what he says. This is how I'd summarize what Jesus says in these verses. This is how I would summarize what Jesus says in these verses.

This is how I would summarize what Jesus says in these verses. This is how I would advance my responsibilities. This is how I would advance my responsibilities. This is how I would advance my responsibilities. This is how I would advance my responsibilities. This is how I would advance my responsibilities. This is how I would advance my responsibilities.

This is how I would advance my responsibilities. This is how I would advance my responsibilities. This is how I would advance my responsibilities. This is how I would advance my responsibilities. May it also be the motivation of our hearts for this year and the days ahead.

[7 : 17] I think from the outset we should all admit that none of us seeks the kingdom first perfectly and none of us ever will. We don't do it and we will not do it.

But by God's grace we can be committed to ongoing growth. And I believe that a new year is an ideal time to recommit to this growth with God's help.

So how do we seek the kingdom first? I have two very simple points this morning. The first is avoid life's common anxieties.

Avoid life's common anxieties. I think one of the most important lessons that we should not miss is that the anxieties that Jesus addresses in this passage before us are faced by all of us.

Not just common to us though, they are common to all people everywhere in different shapes and forms and to different degrees. Everyone faces these anxieties that Jesus addresses in these verses.

[8 : 35] It is true if they are wealthy or poor or somewhere in between. We are all faced with the need to provide for the necessities of life for ourselves and for our families.

And because we live in a fallen world with financial problems coming from all kinds of different situations like job loss and unemployment.

Through business failure and sickness and from droughts and hurricanes and economic recessions. Even when our current needs are being met, we can be tempted to worry about the future.

How are things going to go this year? We can be tempted to worry about whether we'll be able to put food on the table and clothes on our back and shelter over our head.

How are things going to go this year?

[9 : 57] I think the main reason that we worry about money is that we make more of money and wealth than we should. That's the reason we worry about it.

If we see it for what it really is, we wouldn't worry about it. But the reason we worry about money and wealth is we see them for more than we should.

And this is what Jesus points out in verses 19 through 24. It's quite interesting that in the United States, the motto of the United States is, In God we trust.

And it's printed on the money. And it almost seems to serve as an important reminder to people to say, you know, Put your trust in God, not money.

But truth be told, what it should say is, we should trust in God, but we trust in money.

[11 : 00] And that's not just true for the United States, that's true for everyone. That's true for us as well. We should trust in God, but really we trust in money. That is our default function.

That's what we do by default. We do that naturally. Notice, first of all, in verse 19, Jesus points to the real reason, the first reason, that we should not trust in money and wealth.

And the reason is that they're not permanent. They are not lasting possessions. Notice what he says again. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

And the truth is that there are different kinds of situations through which we can lose money and investments and other valuables.

Jesus points out some of them. He points out that sometimes assets will rust and corrode and break down. But for us today, in a modern economy, we understand that bad economies can devalue and destroy assets that we have.

[12 : 23] Sometimes thieves can steal them. And that is the reality that many of us in this room have experienced living on this island. Sometimes the loss comes about as a result of government actions.

Like the roadworks some six or so years ago that destroyed many businesses. Places that you can drive by now that do not exist.

And the means of income that families depended on for decades was just destroyed over a period of time. Others that weren't destroyed are crippled.

And levels of income that they were accustomed to, they no longer have. This financial destruction or reversal could come through government policies.

Like the recent central bank reduction in the discount rate that reduced the interest that many people who have deposits in the bank, they're no longer getting the kind of return on those deposits.

[13 : 28] Or some people who have shares in companies that earn interest are getting the kind of interest they used to get. Of course, it's a blessing for those of us with mortgages and loans.

But those people now have less income. Some are depending on that income. And so they're prone to worry about the reduced income that they're faced with.

But the truth is that even though money and wealth are not enduring, even though they're not permanent possessions, we still trust in them.

And we still make more of them than we should. And there's this belief that if we have a lot of it, we'll be okay. Many of you have heard me share before about a gentleman that I met in my years in the international financial services business.

And he had lost, in a very short period of time, more than \$2 billion. I mean, more recently, we could think of the Bahama situation.

[14 : 37] I drive by that place regularly. It's not my home. I don't know the man. And my heart breaks. To see that someone pumped in about a billion dollars in that property and has gotten from it zero.

Mrs. Merlion gets zero from that. And see, there's this view that if we just have enough of it, we'll be okay. We don't have to worry about this or that. But truth be told, there are numerous examples in this country and in the world that that's just not so.

Having amassed a fortune is no security. And so Jesus reminds us that we are unwise to put our trust in money and possessions because they are not permanent.

And if we do so, we will be disappointed. And so, by contrast, what he does in verse 20 is he tells us that we should store for ourselves treasures in heaven that are secure and enduring and can be lost the way that earthly treasures are lost.

And what is he referring to when he talks about heavenly treasure? These heavenly treasures are the rewards that God gives to those who serve him, who serve him in this life in relation to their individual work for Christ and for his kingdom.

[16 : 16] Jesus is helping us to see that in the same way we can work in this life and acquire money and wealth. Followers of Christ are able to give themselves in service for him, living for him, and thereby store up treasures, heavenly treasures, as a reward in the life to come.

And look at what he says in verse 20. He says that heavenly treasures are protected from moth and rust and thieves.

So in other words, what Jesus is saying is that his followers cannot live only mindful of this life, and he points to the folly of doing so.

The things we treasure in this life, they're not eternal. Now what is the concern of Jesus? What is the heart of the concern of Jesus in all of this?

We see it in verse 21. This is what Jesus is really concerned about. He is concerned that our hearts will follow our treasure.

[17 : 32] And he says, for where your heart, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And when Jesus talks about heart, he's not talking about the organ that pumps the blood through our bodies.

Instead, what he is talking about, and this is what scripture refers to most often when it refers to our hearts, is it refers to the whole inner being of our total person.

And whatever we treasure, our whole person becomes intertwined with it. Our heart follows and becomes loyal to whatever we value.

And so what we treasure is not determined by our mouths. What we treasure is determined by our hearts. What I treasure is not the things I tell you I treasure. What I treasure is what my heart goes after and attaches itself to.

What truly absorbs me, what truly is the center of my life, that is my treasure. And I'm sure that there's no one this morning who would disagree that it is unwise for our hearts and our lives to be absorbed by things that don't last while we neglect things that do last and that are enduring.

[19 : 01] No one would, no one, we would all say that's unwise. It's unwise to do that. Why would you do that? Yet this is our general tendency. Yet this is exactly what we do.

And so the question is, why is it that we do this? Why is it that it is our natural and general tendency to treasure things on this earth than to treasure the things above?

Why is it that though we would say that, we live something else, we live another reality? In other words, we just don't get it. Why don't we get it? Why does Jesus have to stress the obvious to us?

To understand the answers to those questions, we have to consider what Jesus says next in verses 22 and 23, where he talks about two visions, good and bad. And these words of Jesus in verses 22 and 23 seem out of place.

They don't seem to be connected to what he just said about treasures. But deceased pastor and theologian John Stott wisely observed the link between what Jesus said about treasure and what he now says about vision by pointing out that Jesus moved from the comparative durability of two treasures to the comparative benefit that can be derived from two bodily conditions.

[20 : 36] So what is Jesus saying in verses 22 and 23? Jesus is saying that the eye is like a lamp in that it lights the way for the body.

Eyes are necessary to show the body where to walk. They help the hands to coordinate, to do certain tasks and so forth. So a person with a bad eye is not able to see.

So in that sense, his whole body is in darkness. And he walks in darkness. Whereas the seeing person's whole body is in light and that person walks in light.

Now clearly what Jesus is talking about is spiritual sight. And therefore the point is that how we live in relation to earthly treasures and heavenly treasures is a matter of spiritual sight.

If our eye is bad, our outlook on life is wrong, it puts us in darkness and we stumble through life with misplaced values, making more of money and possessions than we should.

[21 : 46] Making less of God and the things of God than we ought to. If our eye is crowded by greed and materialism and selfishness and the accumulation of material resources, we really can't see.

We're blind. Our values are misplaced. But when our eye is spiritually good, we can see.

And we're not in bondage to things of this life. And we value, we treasure the things of God and the things of the life to come. And we live our lives in pursuit of them.

Good eyes put us in the light. We see the true value of things. So we don't make more of money and possessions than we should.

Then Jesus goes on to help us to see that behind the choice of the two treasures, what we lay up, and the two visions, how we are able to see and value the things of this life and the life to come, behind all that is foundationally a more basic choice.

[23 : 00] It's a more basic choice. And it's the choice of who we're going to serve. And he goes on to talk about two masters in verse 24.

Look at what he says in verse 24. No one can serve two masters, for he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Some Bible translations, like the King James Version and the New American Standard Version and the Revised Standard Version, use the term mammon instead of money. And that's because mammon used to mean whatever you put your trust in.

Mammon had a variety of applications. Whatever a person trusted in, that was their mammon. That was mammon to them. But over time, it came to mean money because the primary object of choice for trust for us as human beings is money and possessions.

And so mammon and money became one and the same. And therefore, we read, you cannot serve God and money. Notice that what Jesus is talking about is an image of slavery.

[24 : 20] That's the illustration that he gives us here. Not being able to serve two masters. See, what we're talking about is not employment because with employment, you could have multiple jobs and multiple employers.

But strictly speaking, a slave can only have one master at a time. And so there's no compromise. You're going to hate one or love the other.

There's no in between. And brothers and sisters, this is a sobering point. Very, very sobering.

You would think that Jesus would have said something like, you can't serve God and the devil. He doesn't say that. He says the options are, you're going to serve God or you're going to serve money.

Now, we don't have the luxury and the option of putting in some other things. Well, you know, I may not be serving God like I should, but I'm not serving money. No, Jesus said that those are the two masters. He reduces serving in this life to the options of God and money.

[25 : 31] And what he does is he points out the danger that we all face. Again, borrowing from deceased theologian John Stott, he comments on this choice of trust between God and money this way.

He writes, when the choice is seen for what it is, a choice between creator and creature, between a glorious personal God and a miserable thing called money, between worship and idolatry, it is inconceivable that anybody could make the wrong choice.

And as profound and as true as those words are from John Stott, left to ourselves, every one of us, but make the wrong choice every time.

And this is why, starting in verse 25, Jesus begins to warn us. He's essentially saying to us that all of life's common anxieties are rooted in an overestimation of the value of money and possessions and a misplaced trust and what they can actually do.

And so he calls us to consider God's care for the birds of the air and the lilies and grass of the field. And what he's doing is he is seeking to convince us that since we're more valuable than birds and lilies and grass, that we can trust God to take care of us so that we don't have to worry about our lives and about our needs.

[27 : 26] And really, it's an issue of trust. And this is what Jesus gets at in verse 30. Look at what he says in verse 30. Notice that he addresses it to you of little faith.

It's an issue of trust. And wherever we're not trusting God and instead trusting money, we will become engulfed in the anxieties of life, putting food on the table, putting clothes on our back, putting a roof over our head.

And in our modern world, we have other anxieties connected to that as well. For those of you who belong to Christ this morning, Jesus gives us two reasons that we should not worry in verse 32.

First of all, he tells us that that's what the unbelievers do. That's what the Gentiles do. They run after those things.

And then, second, he tells us that our Heavenly Father knows that we need them all. Now, in this passage, though, Jesus not only is calling us to avoid life's common anxieties.

[29 : 11] He does more than that. He also tells us to pursue God's chief priorities. And this brings me to my second and final point. This is what Jesus calls us to do in verse 33.

And it's the ultimate reason that Jesus wants us to trust God and not money. It's the ultimate reason that Jesus has said all that he has said to bring us to this particular point in all that he says.

Jesus calls us to pursue the kingdom of God and a right relationship with God.

And he knows that if we are engulfed with the things of this world, the common anxieties of life, distracted by them, we cannot and therefore we will not seek the kingdom of God as a matter of our first priority.

And here when Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God, he's not talking about the kingdom of God that so many preachers today use as some buzz phrase and they reduce it down to some humanistic concept, likening it to the kingdoms of this world.

[30 : 36] No, that's not what he's talking about. The kingdom of God here is best understood to refer to the sovereign rule and government of God over all things. Jesus is saying we have to pursue that, we have to pursue the sovereign rule of God over all things.

We have to recognize that God in every single moment of every single day is ruling over all things. His government, His kingdom, is in the heavens and He rules over all.

And we have to be pursuing that in all that we do, in all of our relationships, in all of our actions, we have to be doing it with the awareness that it comes under the kingdom of God. And God has a will and God has a way and God has something to say.

God has not left us to ourselves in that particular area. The kingdom of God has something to say about every single aspect of our lives. We don't live our lives in a vacuum.

We don't just come in here and we live in the kingdom of God, then we go outside, we do another thing, or we go in our homes and we do another thing. No, we live in the kingdom of God at all times. Through Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God has come to this earth and through his death and burial and resurrection, men and women, boys and girls can be born again and they can see and enter and live in the kingdom as citizens of the kingdom of God.

[32 : 17] And not only that, we can have this benefit that though in and of ourselves we are not perfect, we can have right standing with God through Jesus Christ. The one who gives us the perfection and gives us the holiness that we need, that is not imparted to us, it doesn't make us holy, it doesn't make us perfect, but it's credited to us.

We have the benefit of it. God counts it to us. And Jesus says we are to pursue that and really what he's calling us to is a life of discipleship.

And notice the promise in verse 33. And all these things will be added to you as well. Jesus promises that as we seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, our heavenly father will add these things to us as well.

And really why does he add them? He adds them so that we can seek the kingdom of God first and his righteousness. Otherwise, we'll be tempted to worry and to be engulfed in life's anxieties.

And so Jesus concludes in verse 34 by again reminding us not to worry, but to seek the kingdom first. Or he tells us that we are not to worry because he wants us to seek the kingdom, and he knows that every day is going to give us reason to worry.

[33 : 55] Every single day. And he says, don't worry. Let me close by suggesting to us three spiritual habits that we can all seek to cultivate and grow in that will help us to pursue God's priorities in terms of seeking his kingdom first and his righteousness.

These three habits are taken from the excellent book by David Mathis entitled Habits of Grace. And we'll be talking about this book in the coming weeks.

But I want to just share with you these three habits. As I thought about it, you can think of it like a stool. A stool needs three legs to be sturdy and to be able to support someone sitting on it.

The first habit is the habit of reading God's word. Reading and considering and meditating on God's word each day is how we know and are able to do the revealed will of God.

It is foundational to how we grow as believers and how we seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. God has taken the time to give us his word.

[35 : 22] He has revealed his will to us. We should never make a greater effort to try to hear from God in a vacuum or to hear from some individual about our lives that we make to get in God's word to learn how we have to live our lives.

It doesn't mean that God can't speak in those other ways. He can and he does. But that should not be where our emphasis lies. Our emphasis should be in getting into God's word.

And this requires an intentional plan. This is not just a random thing. We don't just go to the refrigerator in the morning and randomly grab something out and choose to eat it. No, we are thoughtful about what we do.

And it's the same with God's word. And so I want to encourage you as we embark upon this new year, get some kind of a plan to get into God's word. And there are many of them available.

There are extended ones and shorter ones. They're available online and other places. Choose one and use one. The second habit is the habit of prayer.

[36 : 32] prayer. Separate and apart from praying to God for our needs, our prayers should be shaped by the word of God.

And that is why it's helpful to have this practice and pattern in our days of getting in God's word. And often you would find that God's word will begin to shape and form the prayers that you're lifting up to the Lord.

habit. And then the third habit is the habit of belonging to Christ's body. What we're talking about is the local church. Not, I'm a member of the universal body of Christ. No, we're talking about the local church.

There is no true seeking the kingdom of God away from the people of God. In other words, there's no lone rangerism. If God wanted us, whether in our natural families, on the spiritual family, if he wanted that to be some other way, he would have just let us come up on our own and we don't relate to anyone, but he puts us in families, both biologically and spiritually, because it's what we need.

We need to belong. We need to be in a position to receive in the body and to give in the body. And God provides so much of what we need.

[37 : 49] Through brothers and sisters to whom we are connected, the encouragement, the counsel, the correction, the support in times of need, and trial. And it's a blessing both to be on the giving end and on the receiving end.

So brothers and sisters, let us by God's grace in this new year, seek the kingdom first. We can only do it by his grace.

So often, new years are a time when people are very zealous. And many times in our zeal, we overlook our weaknesses and our frailties and our inability to carry out the many things that we resolve to do.

Let us not do that with this call to seek the kingdom first. We will only seek the kingdom first by God's grace and with God's help.

Let's pray together. Amen.