# One Priority

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[0:00] Father in heaven, we praise you and we thank you because you are our Father. You know every need before we ask. And Father, we thank you for your gracious rule in our lives.

We pray that your Holy Spirit will open your word to us, that we can worship you in spirit and in truth with the freedom that comes as we entrust ourselves to you.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Please be seated. Well, I want to echo Jeremy's welcome to you and good morning.
And given our passage today, I thought maybe Jeremy could have asked the question, what are you feeling anxious about today? And you could turn to your neighbor and ask them that as a way of getting to know them.
Well, that means going deep pretty fast, doesn't it? And what would you say? What's on your mind right now? What are you feeling fearful about or uncertain about? Well, we bring these things to church.
[1:02] We bring these things to God's word. And God knows it's important to us. God knows that we deal with anxiety. Jesus' disciples dealt with anxiety.

And that's why Jesus talks so much about anxiety in his sermon here. It's something that his disciples knew and understood very, very well.
Some anxiety that we experience in our lives has medical reasons behind it. And it's very important for us to consult with doctors and with counselors.
They can be God's instruments of grace and healing for us. There's lots of other kinds of anxieties, though, as well.
A large body of anxiety. And a lot of it, Jesus is saying here, has to do with our relationship to material possessions. Jesus says that those possessions have a powerful potential to rule your lives.
[2:03] You know, to rule your ambitions, your moods, the things that we spend our time on. They rule our relationships. And most importantly, they can rule how well we trust God.

And that's because anxiety about what we have or don't have can really grip us. And they can keep us from flourishing in our relationship with God.
So that's why Jesus' teaching is so very important for us today. Because our relationship with material possessions, which can bring great anxiety, is often a blind spot for us.
We tend to hide that in our hearts and not talk about it. But Tim Keller, who is the pastor of a very large church in New York City, wrote a very good book called Counterfeit Gods.
And he was talking about the power that money can hold over us. And he talks about a very strong defense mechanism that comes with being ruled by our wealth.
[3:04] He says this. He says, As a pastor, I've had people come to me and confess that they struggle with almost every kind of sin. Almost. I cannot recall anyone ever coming to me and saying, I spend too much money on myself.

I think my greedy lust for money is harming my family, my soul, and the people around me. Never heard that. And he said, That's because greed hides itself from the victim.
The money gods, modus operandi, includes blindness to your own heart. So what Jesus is doing, and that's very true, Jesus spends this large part of the Sermon on the Mount teaching about material possessions so that his light can enter the dark places in our hearts with regard to these material possessions to open our eyes that were once blind.
And it's critical because our thinking about our wealth has everything to do with whether or not our relationship with God flourishes. And that's why Jesus spends so much time in his teaching on the subject of money.

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Now this is highlighted in verse 24, how it affects our relationship with God. He says there, if you want to turn to Matthew 6, verse 24, he says, 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.
[4:37] You cannot serve God and money. Well, you can't be clearer than that. Jesus is saying we cannot have two rulers in our lives.

You have to choose. Because you can't give your life over to both of them. They both are gods. There is only one that's the true God.
And the demands of the two rulers are going to conflict. You cannot be true to both of them. And so the question that come to us today, as we're thinking about this, is that it is the question of how can I make sure that I am submitting myself to God's good and gracious rule into my life?
And I'm not submitting myself to the rule of material possessions. So what can I do to help my relationship with God really flourish? And Jesus says three things.
The last one I'm going to just very briefly touch on. But he says three things. He says, Lay up treasures in heaven. And secondly, He says, Stop being anxious about your life.
[5:45] And then finally he says, Seek first the kingdom of God. And all these things will be added to you. All the things that you need. So let's look first at verse 20 and 21.

Jesus says there's two ways to live. You can live with a view to accumulating valuable things on earth. Or you can live with a view to gathering up and accumulating valuable things in heaven. Those are the two ways. You can't do both. Those are the two. And Jesus says to us in here, in this passage, He says, You know, it's not really that much of a choice.
It's kind of a no-brainer. Because the treasures on earth are both temporary and they are insecure. And that's why he says there that thieves break in and steal.
There is no sure treasure. And moth and rust will destroy it. There's no sure treasure on earth. Now this was brought home to me when Alexander was interested in investing his finances.
[6:50] All his many finances that he has. He's 15 years old. And wanted to start investing. So I said, Sure, I can help you with it. I can invest something online. He said, Okay, I want to invest in Bitcoin.

This was in December 2017. Bitcoin. And I said, Okay, but it can't be more than $50. Because I have some questions about Bitcoin. But it will be a good investment lesson.
So the day after I bought the $50 worth of Bitcoin, Bitcoin tumbled 30%. And Alexander told me yesterday when I was asking about this, How was your investment?
He said, I have lost 200% on that investment since I put it in over the last year. So don't ask me for financial advice. But you know, That was a good lesson for him.
On what the nature of material possessions is. It is temporary. It is uncertain. And that lesson is nothing compared to the financial crisis 10 years ago.
[7:58] That was far more widespread. U.S. households, People who owned homes, Which is such a fundamental thing for us, They lost a cumulative $3.3 trillion in home equity in that one year of 2008.

And not only that, But the stock market, Where many investments are, Erased $6.9 trillion in shareholder wealth in that same year.
Very powerful lessons about the nature of our wealth. There are lessons to us that reveal what the nature of possessions are.
Moths and rust destroy. Thieves steal. And Jesus said that this is a ruler that will certainly let you down.
And in fact, The only certainty about the God of possessions is that you will lose all of it on the day that you die. It's the one certainty about possessions that Jesus teaches.
[9:01] And so Jesus said, Why would you choose anything else? Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. And the question that I asked when I was looking at this is that what are those treasures in heaven?

What is it that we are accumulating in heaven? How are we doing it? Well, basically, Jesus is teaching here that storing up treasures means that your eyes are on heaven.
That you measure all your behavior and your decisions by what effect they will have on heaven. Not only that, but you think about what it means that you will receive something.
Where are you heading for when you are thinking about treasures in heaven? Your great ambition is to live for those treasures and the rewards that Jesus promises all through the Sermon on the

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Mount.
And in thinking about what those treasures might be, you can start by looking at the Beatitudes. So if you turn briefly to the page over, 809, Jesus tells us very clearly what some of those treasures are.
[10:13] That we are to keep fixed in our minds. And that we are to live for. And that are meant to shape us in our relationship with possessions. He says, you know, Blessed are when you're poor in spirit and you know that you're poor and needy in the kingdom.

Because yours is the kingdom of heaven. You are living in that kingdom now if Jesus is your ruler. And it is a foretaste of the great and glorious kingdom that Jesus will bring one day.
When he comes in all of his power and his splendor. That is yours right now. And secondly, he says, Blessed are those who mourn for their own sins, for the losses in your life, for what has happened to you that's sinful.
He says, For they shall be comforted. That what you have before you is the healing of all hurts. Where every tear will be wiped away.
Every pain and suffering will be lifted away. And death will be no more. He then says, Blessed are those who hunger for thirst. Or blessed are those who meek.
[11:16] In other words, Those who use the power that God has given them to serve on his behalf. On Jesus' behalf. Because you shall inherit the earth. There is a new heaven and a new earth that is before each of you.

And then blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Why? Because they shall be satisfied. The pure desires that God gives to you. The things that God places in our hearts.
Those things will be completely and utterly satisfied. Beyond anything you could wildly hope for. He says, Then blessed are the merciful. Why? Because of the treasure in heaven.
You will receive mercy. You are going to revel in God's undeserved kindness to you for eternity. And it is very, very good.
And then blessed are the pure in heart. But those who are single-minded in their devotion to him. He says, They shall see God. And I think this is one of the great treasures that changes our life.
[12:22] That God promises that we will see him. That we will see him as he is. We will live with him. The greatest thing that is before us is that we will see the one that we worship.

The one that we love with all our hearts and our minds and our soul and our strength. We will know ourselves loved by him. And we will live with him in his presence forever.
And then finally he says, Blessed are the peacemakers. Those who bring reconciliation in relationships. He says, Because they are going to be called sons and daughters of God.
There is no greater status. When you think of all the things you hope for and that you might lose in this life. What material possessions give for you. Know that the heavenly treasure is that no greater status can we possibly have.
Than being eternally adopted by God as our heavenly father. These are some of the heavenly treasures that Jesus says, That's what you live for.
[13:20] That's what you want to be storing up in the way that you live your life. That is what you want your eyes firmly fixed on. And so that's why Paul prays in Ephesians 1, 17 and 18.

He prays this marvelous prayer. He says, And that's why I think Jesus teaches about the healthy eye and the bad eye in verses 22 through 23.
If you look at those, I puzzled over those verses. Struggled with them a bit. What does he mean by this? Well, the word healthy also has as part of its meaning the idea of generosity and being single-minded.
And so what Jesus is teaching here, I think, is that healthy eyes are fixed on God's generosity alone. They are fixed on his goodness for you and his treasures in heaven.
This absolutely fills your body with the knowledge of God and his grace to you. And therefore, your eye becomes a lamp. Your eye shines out of you the grace of God that he has given to you.
[14:54] You, in a sense, reflect that. On the other hand, he says, If the eyes of your heart are focused on possessions and living for them and you are ruled by them, there is a darkness there.

There is a separation from God that fills your body. That's the darkness. You can't see the generosity of God. You can't reflect that grace. And that's the result of having a wrong master.
And I think one of the powerful and practical ways that we fix our eyes on God's generosity is to generously give a portion of our income to his work, to the work of his kingdom.

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Because this opens our hearts to him. It's really a joyful expression that he is our Lord, that he is our Father who cares for us in every single possible way.
And so that's why there's an urgency to Jesus' teaching here. He's saying, don't choose the wrong master. Choose real life. Choose to live for the treasures of heaven that Jesus has won for you on the cross, at great cost to himself.
[16:03] And secondly, Jesus teaches you and I, verses 25 to 31, don't be anxious about your needs, but instead trust God to take care of you.

And I've got to say, that's an easy thing for me to read and a very difficult thing for me to do. Cast your anxieties on God the Father who provides for you.
And you might say, one of the things that makes it hard is that there have been times in my life when I didn't feel God cared for me and provided even though I trusted him. And you might also say, what about all the Christians who are homeless, who are refugees, who starve or who experience violence because of their faith in Jesus Christ?
Did Jesus keep this promise? Well, at the end of verse 25, he says a surprising thing, Jesus does. He says, don't be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on.
He says, is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? You see what Jesus is saying there, that he's saying your life, which includes your soul and your body, is much more than physical life that's sustained by food and that we clothe.
[17:21] In other words, Jesus says, don't be anxious about your soul and your body because those who might take away your food or your clothing or even your life in death, they cannot take your real life away.

They cannot rob you of your resurrection body. It is absolutely secure in Jesus Christ. In a little over a week, I am going to GAFCON in Jerusalem, which is a global Anglican Futures conference.
It's a gathering of 2,000 delegates from Anglican churches in 50 countries. It's an extraordinary gathering every five years. And five years ago, I was at the GAFCON in Nairobi, and I met a number of the delegates from different countries who faced all kinds of anxiety-producing situations. Many had lost homes and churches and their possessions because of terrorism or because of extremists. Some even faced violence and death because they followed Jesus, and they knew people in their churches that experienced this.
There were many there that faced hunger and famine. So you see this great cause of anxiety for them. But they also knew that the bottom-line defense against their anxiety is that in Christ, they are immortal, and that to die is gain.
[18:56] This is Jesus' teaching. And that's why Jesus says in Luke 12, don't fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. In other words, he's saying there's something far worse than death, and it can never happen to you in Christ.

Jesus is teaching that your life is ultimately safe and secure in him. In every painful loss and hardship, God holds us in his hands.
He continues to be our loving Heavenly Father who provides for this. And knowing this is the only way not to be anxious when we experience these kinds of things in our life.
And I think that there's a great deal we can learn from our brothers and sisters at GAFCON because deciding not to be anxious in our own less extreme hardships, usually, and our losses is very, very hard.
We're going to sing at the end of our service about storms in life, about God being a shelter in our storm. And we don't know why God allows storms in our lives.
[20:05] But Jesus teaches in this sermon that those storms, in all of those storms we experience, two things are true. That he is in charge, God your Father is in charge, and that he loves each of you dearly.

He loves you a lot. And he is after your greatest good in those storms. And so Jesus tells us to look at two things. He says, Look at the birds.
Look out there at the trees, and look at the birds. He said, They don't do a lot of work, these sparrows. They're not farmers. But he says, Your Heavenly Father feeds them. In other words, he creates and sustains each of them.
He is in charge. And then he says the second thing, The greater are you, not more valuable than they are. Don't you know that the one who sustains every tiny bit of the universe loves you dearly?

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He is your Heavenly Father. And he drives it home. He says, Look at the flowers. He says, Look at that field. Look at the lilies that are there. They're not working either. But your Father clothes them more beautifully than King Solomon or the most beautifully dressed celebrity on Oscar night.
[21:26] He said, This is what he does for them. How much more, and they will just wither very soon, how much more will he clothe you who are his sons and his daughters?

How much more does he love you? Well, what he tells us here is that everything we need comes from his loving hand. And he is very good at giving us gifts.
We can trust him, trust his hands, and not be anxious. And this doesn't mean that he gives us all we want or desire or that he owes us a certain status or that we're somehow entitled to a carefree life. It's not what he promised his disciples. The best good that can happen to me is not that I am financially successful. It is that I get to know God better.
That's what he is teaching. In fact, in our storms, the choice between God ruling and possessions ruling is made very clear.
[22:26] It becomes clear. I ask more questions about my life. I draw closer to him in that storm. And God's desire, in the end, for each of you, is that you will treasure the right things.

That you and I will treasure him and your relationship with him. A very practical application of this was a sermon I heard on this passage.
It was from the U.S. and it was given in 2008 at the height of that financial crisis I was talking about. And he was preaching to a congregation that was really affected by that crisis.
A lot of losses there. And he said to them, on this passage, he said to them, when you choose to love the Lord, you realize he is your Lord.
And he gives to you what he wants you to have. So he said, in this crisis that we're experiencing, my job is not finding out who's responsible for my losses.
[23:30] He said, no, it's to manage what God has given to me. In trust you say, last year I had twice as much that you gave me, that I managed.

And I was thankful for it. He said, this year you've given me half that amount. And I can joyfully use that as well for your glory. I can live for God in an older car or a smaller house and with a less important job.
I can honor him in that way just as well. And that may be our greatest good. This is the faith, which is a deep faith that Jesus is talking about.
It's the kind of trust in God that is the very opposite of anxiety. And in fact, it gives a deep freedom from anxiety. God your Father knows what you need before you ask.
And Jesus gives a couple of practical things to kind of underline why it's good not to be anxious. He says, look, verse 27, you can't even add an hour to your life by worrying about the things you need anyway.
[24:36] And I think this is probably a good thing for us to repeat when we're feeling anxious. I can't add an hour to my life here. I can't add an hour by doing this. It does no good, Jesus knows, absolutely no good to be anxious about our needs.

It doesn't change our situation. In fact, Jesus knows it's harmful for us. And he wants our greatest good. And then the other practical thing is, there is something that affects people around you when you trust God in this way.
Make him Lord of your possessions. The Gentiles, Jesus says in verse 31, don't know God as their Heavenly Father. They seek after all these things. They obsess about their needs.
They worry about them. It's a big part of the activity. He said, you on the other hand are meant to be a contrast. To know that your Father knows what you need.
And to abide in that truth as you go through the storms in your life. This is a deep encouragement to people around you. But it also says something to the world.
[25:40] There is something powerful and real about that God who is their Lord. Now I want to close with verse 33 and just leave this passage, leave that verse with you.

Because verse 33 sums up what Jesus has said. He says, how do I choose God as my ruler over the rule of possessions in my life?
He says, by storing up riches in heaven, by not being anxious, and trusting in God who is my Heavenly Father. He sums it up by saying, verse 33, seek first the kingdom of God and all these things you really need will be added to you.

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Do you see what he's saying? He is saying, take all that anxiety energy and invest it into kingdom energy. And that's because anxiety makes you feel intensely self-focused.
It can cut you off from God and other people. But seeking the kingdom with all of our energy, even as we are making money, which God says is actually good to do because we can give to him, seeking the kingdom exercises our generosity of heart.
[26:56] So we focus our thoughts and our plans and our wealth and our ambitions on the Lord Jesus and the people that he calls us to serve. It's the course of life that pleases him in every circumstance in your life.

It's what we pray in the Lord's Prayer. Thy will be done, not my will be done. May your kingdom come. And in doing that, Jesus promises that he gives the very best to you as you do it.
He is faithful. He will do it. Living under his gracious rule gives us all that we could possibly ask for or want. So may God, the Holy Spirit, give you a deep love and an abiding trust in your heavenly Father as you, with all of the energy in you, seek his kingdom in Jesus' name.
Amen. Amen.

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