

# Matthew 11:2-6 - The King and His Kingdom

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Preacher: Will Spink

[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Amen. Thank you, guys. That is so beautiful, so helpful to us. In case you hadn't noticed, we were thinking about Jesus as our King this morning.

For those of you who don't know, I'm a big Clemson fan. I'm also very competitive.

So several of my Alabama fan friends have found it helpful in the past couple of weeks to introduce me repeatedly to a song that I was previously only vaguely familiar with.

In order to be a good sport, here it is. Okay, that's enough.

[ 1 : 01 ] That was quite enough. And I want all the Auburn fans to leave right now. If you love Alabama, just hearing that song, that fight song that's played when good things are happening, that evokes excitement, doesn't it?

And some of you almost stood up and started clapping, but it felt strange in church. There's passion behind that excitement that you would have.

There's Alabama fans walking in the back door because they heard something that just was going on in here. Wow. It works. Many of you probably didn't know that there are words, lyrics, that go with this song.

There are Alabama fans who know these words. What many of my Alabama fans have told me recently is it's that song that goes, Yay, Alabama, da-da-da-da-da.

And I've had to tell them that, no, it doesn't go da-da-da-da-da. It actually has words beyond the first two. Not words I'm concerned about, but words about football, about playing football, about being excited about their team and what's going on.

[ 2 : 15 ] There's line after line of detailed words that even many fans don't know exist. That's not just true of Alabama, of course, but somebody needed to pick on them.

And the point is, you can be an avid fan, you can even be a great player on the team and not know all the words, can't you? You can love Alabama, you can be excited about what goes on with that, you can contribute to what the team is doing and not know all of the words behind that song.

Similarly, we've been talking here at the start of the new year about the vision and mission of Southwood, about some of our core commitments and foundational beliefs, things that are real priorities for us.

And the point is not that I want you to memorize all the words. It's just not the most important thing, frankly. But rather that we would all embrace the spirit of the song, so to speak.

The words you know best are probably our mission statement to experience and express grace. You've heard us talking about those in the past couple of weeks.

[ 3 : 26 ] A couple of weeks ago about experiencing grace, having our constant needs constantly met in Christ. Last weekend we had our express grace conference.

And Ray Cortese came in and gave us some great challenges about being on mission together. To take the good news of Jesus to a world in need of hope. In need of knowing the grace of Jesus for themselves.

But there are other words that are a part of our vision and mission. Experience and express grace is what we do in order to see our vision accomplished.

Our vision, why the church exists, to advance the kingdom of God. That's the vision that in order to accomplish that, we say the mission to accomplish that vision is to experience and express grace.

You hear us talk about other things. That as we experience and express grace, where do we do that? We do that on Sunday. In small groups.

[ 4 : 28 ] And while serving. Together we get together and say particularly we're going to focus our serving in three particular areas. We're going to love student ministries and community development and shepherding.

Those are going to be things that we together love. We're committed to those. We think they're priorities for our church. Now my point is not for you to memorize all that that's on the screen, right? Just to get all the words so that you know them. But in the next couple of weeks we're going to talk about some of these key priorities in the life of this church. And more importantly about what God's word has to say about them.

And why they're important. Whether you memorize these lyrics or not. I hope it will help you appreciate the beauty of the song. To be excited by the song.

When you see God working in these ways in and through our church. This morning we're going to start with talking about advancing the kingdom of God. And we'll mention community development a little bit along the way.

[ 5 : 30 ] But to do that I want us to start in Matthew chapter 11. Matthew chapter 11 we'll be reading starting at verse 2. This is the word of God.

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ. He sent word by his disciples and said to him. Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?

And Jesus answered them. Go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight and the lame walk. Lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear.

And the dead are raised up. And the poor have the good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me. The grass withers.

The flowers fade. Mission statements come and go. These words of our God will stand forever.

Pray with me. Father we are so thankful.

[ 6 : 33 ] That you have called us to be a part of your kingdom. And we ask King Jesus that you would teach us this morning. What that even means. Show us how you would have us live in your kingdom.

Show us how we can advance your kingdom. That you would be lifted up and exalted in all things. We ask it in your name. Amen. As we've talked about experiencing and expressing grace the past couple of weeks.

One of the things we've noticed repeatedly is the centrality of Jesus. Right? We said grace is not merely this theoretical or theological concept. Something out there that we can't really understand. It's a person. A savior who meets our needs. One who is our greatest treasure. The pearl of great price that we would be zealous to share with others.

That they would know him. I would hate for us this morning to miss the most vital part of considering what it means to advance the kingdom of God. And that very obvious and simple thing is who the king is.

[ 7 : 39 ] You'll notice in this passage that we just read. That's the fundamental concern that John the Baptist and his followers have, isn't it? The primary question they want answered is really, Jesus, are you the one?

Or is there another king coming? Are you the Messiah, the promised king, the one we've been waiting for? Or is it somebody else? That's an interesting question, isn't it?

Interesting because John has already decided, hasn't he? Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. John announced that when Jesus came.

But now John's in prison. Things aren't maybe going perhaps the way John expected them to develop when the king showed up. When his ministry began, John was perhaps a little confused. And he's beginning to wonder if he made a mistake. He wants to hear straight from Jesus himself. Are you the king? And Jesus agrees with the importance of that emphasis.

[ 8 : 41 ] As he interacts with John's followers, he comes back in verse 6 at the end and makes it clear that alignment with him is the key to being for God's kingdom. Blessed is the one who's connected to me, who stays with me, who's not offended and doesn't go away because of me.

He's the one leading the kingdom, right? He's the one upon whose shoulders the government rests. The one declaring that the kingdom of God is coming and in himself bringing it into this world and into the lives of the people who hear him.

You can't have the kingdom without the king. You can't. We'll talk about what this means for us in a bit, but for now let's realize that when we say our vision is to advance the kingdom of God, that

means this.

It means that we want to see the active rule and reign of King Jesus made more and more evident in our hearts, in our city, in our world.

We know Jesus is king over everything, right? That's not in question. He rules whether we acknowledge it or not. But when we watch the news, when we interact with our families, when we slow down and examine our own hearts, a lot of times it doesn't feel like that, does it?

[10:06] It doesn't seem like he's ruling. We realize his rule is not readily apparent everywhere. Things don't always work the way they're supposed to. They don't look the way we expect Jesus' kingdom to look.

God created his world to be marked by peace and justice and righteousness, right? But the wholeness of God's world has been broken.

Remember, this is the promise of the prophets that we saw during Christmas when we were looking at Isaiah 9, that this promised king is coming and he's going to bring into this world a rule marked by peace and justice and righteousness.

We're to pray, Jesus says, when he's here for God's kingdom to come and what that means is his will is going to be done here as it is in heaven, that this place would look like the king is ruling, all people knowing and trusting and obeying the righteous king.

It's not like that today, is it? But that's what's promised. And Jesus brings the foretaste of that kingdom when he comes to earth. We get a taste of it here.

[11:11] Jesus says the kingdom, what it feels like, what his kingdom is about is first of all having a message to proclaim. It comes in word, doesn't it?

Look at verse 5. It says the kingdom is to be about the good news being preached to the poor. The good news preached to the poor.

There's a message of hope, isn't there? A word of hope for those who are empty and needy. And what is it? There's a new king. Things are changing.

There's a new king here. Someone is freely meeting your need. Repent, Jesus often said, for the kingdom of God is at hand.

In other words, turn from yourself and your sin and the things that you've put on the throne and find your hope and your fullness in him, in the new king. The message of the kingdom is that your broken relationship with God has been healed by the king.

[12:14] That in Jesus there is peace for those most fervently at war with God. There's righteousness for those most muddled by the filth of their sin against God.

There's grace to meet your deepest needs. The kingdom of God comes to us in the person of Jesus, the new king. And as we meet him and trust him, his reign advances in our hearts and our lives.

So we must tell people of the new king. Announce his gracious rule. It's a kingdom in word. But the kingdom comes not merely in words, right?

It's not merely something to talk about. It's not pronounced that a new king is coming. But it also comes indeed. The pattern of scripture is that the kingdom of God is not only something you hear about, but also something you experience the reality of.

Think of Aslan. You know Aslan from C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia? When Aslan, the true king of Narnia, comes to Narnia in the first book, The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, He enters into a Narnia where everything has frozen over, right?

[13:30] It's under the rule of the White Witch, and the Narnians are beginning to despair, aren't they? It's hopeless. It's always winter and never Christmas. Everything's frozen.

And when Aslan begins to be on the move, what happens? The flowers start to bud. The grass grows. It starts popping up in between the ice and the snow on the ground.

Birds start chirping. The brook is heard gurgling again. It's not quite so cold as it has been. And so even before they meet Aslan himself, Peter and Susan and Lucy and even Edmund a little bit, they can't wait to meet this king.

They are wanting him to reign. They are feeling what it feels like for Aslan to be the king who's reigning, and they can't wait. They're longing for it.

They hear about him, yes, and they experience the reality of the coming king. When Jesus responds to John's followers here, what does he show them about his kingdom?

[ 14 : 39 ] It's not just that there's a message of good news being preached, is it? Jesus says, Go and tell John what you hear and see.

And then he lists the things that they've watched. The blind receive their sight. The lame walk. Lepers are cleansed. And the deaf hear. And the dead are raised up. And the poor have good news preached to them.

All of these things. This is what you're supposed to go tell them, Jesus says. All of these, by the way, are examples from Isaiah's prophecy of what happens and what things are going to be like when the king comes.

But it's not just here in this passage. Over and over again, when Jesus talks about the kingdom, watch what's going on and what happens when Jesus' kingdom advances.

Just a few examples. Matthew chapter 4. He went throughout all Galilee. Jesus is teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

[ 15 : 40 ] Matthew 9. Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

Luke describes it the same way. Chapter 9. Jesus sends out his disciples to go into these towns. And what does he send them to do? To proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.

They go together. And so this happens and then crowds start gathering around and they're following Jesus and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing.

One more from Matthew 10. Proclaim as you go, Jesus says to these disciples that he's sending out. What's he sending them to do? The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The kingdom is here. How are you going to know? Heal the sick. Raise the dead. Cleanse lepers. Cast out demons. You received without paying.

[ 16 : 36 ] Give without pay. Jesus sends them out to preach, yes. But to have people experience the reality of the kingdom too.

Some of these deeds of the kingdom are authenticating the message, right? They're validating Jesus as the true king, the one who's been promised. But don't miss what they're doing at the same time.

They're demonstrating the reality, the power, the impact of the kingdom. I love that line at the end. You received without paying.

Give without pay. Go out to tell them the kingdom is here. You've received it freely. Now give it away freely. As you heal and cast out demons, remember you received this kingdom for free, so share it with others for free.

It's grace, right? Experience grace. And then express grace freely the same way. People should experience the kingdom of God as blessing them beyond their wildest dreams without asking anything from them in order to receive that blessing.

[ 17 : 43 ] That's grace.

A new king is magnanimous in his generosity and grace. And so you experience him. That's what it feels like to be near him and to know him. He wants us to experience glimpses of his glory, so to speak.

Life in Jesus, the way life was originally intended to be before the wholeness of God's kingdom was broken. Peace, peace, justice, righteousness.

Relationships that find you in shame and hiding and drive out the loneliness that you feel. Societies where you experience the dignity of work you were created for.

Systems that put you on equal footing regardless of your race or your background. Friends and families who are safe havens because they extend forgiveness when you don't deserve it.

[ 19 : 10 ] Communities who welcome a stranger or a refugee in to experience the welcome of God that he showed them when they were estranged from him. When you talk about things like this and say that's what the kingdom of God feels like, someone's going to say, social gospel.

That's social gospel. That's placing our hope in economic and political change rather than placing our hope in Jesus and entrusting him.

Let me be clear. This is not the social gospel. Neither is it a theology of two kingdoms that never meet or impact each other.

A kingdom of God and spiritual things over here that we play on Sunday. And a kingdom of man and physical things that we talk about the rest of the week. Listen, I want to be very clear not to confuse us on this.

Knowing King Jesus is primary. But King Jesus touches everything and he's often experienced before he's met.

[ 20 : 18 ] People ought to come in contact with the church of Jesus Christ and feel the thawing of winter. Something has changed. It's different and I want this.

I want to be a part of it. They ought to long even more to meet the king whose land is like this.

Whose people treat each other like this. Whose people treat them like this.

They want to know that king. That's why part of advancing God's kingdom is with our words.

Announcing the reign of King Jesus and calling people to turn to him and know him.

It's never less than that. And it's also why you're doing kingdom work indeed. Where God has called you. And helping this fear God has called you into to feel more like God intended it to feel.

To be just and righteous and peaceful. Gracious. Dignifying of image bearers of God. Pushing back the effects of the fall.

[ 21 : 21 ] Where he's called you. By deeds of love and mercy the heavenly kingdom comes. Right?

We sang that. When we do God's will here where he's called us.

When we're giving others a taste of the reign of the king. In word and in deed. All the time both of them together. A kingdom in word and in deed.

A kingdom heard about and experienced. It's why we send missionaries to India to tell them of King Jesus. And we welcome international college students into our homes and lives.

It's why we tell someone in material poverty of a God who loves them. And help them get a job where they can experience the dignity of work he created them for. It's why we want orphans in Peru.

And in Huntsville. To know a heavenly father who cares for them. And an education that helps them survive without engaging in sinful and abusive patterns they've been born into.

[ 22 : 28 ] Make them feel hated and abused and used. Rather than loved. Southwood. Southwood.

There is no end to the opportunities to see the kingdom advance holistically.

In word and in deed. Both ways. I praise God for how he has used us in that. This is a church that's been committed to that. And particularly with Sarah's leadership in community development.

God has used us in that. Allowed us to partner with many wonderful people here in Huntsville. And around the world. Groups who are co-laborers with us.

They want like we do. To see people feel and experience the reality of the kingdom. If you were here last weekend and got to walk through those hallways. When many of our partners were out there talking to us.

About what God's given them. About where he's placed them in his kingdom. They all were saying similar things. We're here with these people. Or to address this issue.

[ 23 : 29 ] That people would feel and experience the reality of the king. That they would hear of Jesus. And that they would know and experience it at the same time. What great opportunities we have.

Lock arms with them. What a privilege to be a part of the advance of the kingdom of God. It is advancing. Francis Schaeffer said. The kingdom of God is moving forward.

He's doing it. God's advancing his kingdom. We're praying for the privilege of being a part of it. And he's given that to us. What a great privilege.

But whose kingdom am I really advancing? Jesus finishes this passage with a bit of a challenge to John's followers. Look at verse 6.

Blessed is the one who is not offended by me. It may not sound like a challenge at first. He's talking about somebody being blessed, right? But he's just said. This is what the kingdom is like.

[ 24 : 29 ] The kingdom is like what we just talked about. All of these things happening. And people experiencing the reality of it in word and deed. And then Jesus comes back and says. And don't forget who the king is.

Blessed is the one who stays connected with me. Because the kingdom is all about him. And you hear these words. And my initial reaction was. Yeah, that seems fine. You don't offend me, Jesus. Jesus, no problem. I can fit you right into my plans. We work well together. This is great. And I'm reminded about the challenge Ray gave us last week from Luke 19.

For us as a church to be on mission. And particularly on God's mission. To seek and to save the lost. As we've said before many times. To realize we're in spiritual warfare. That we're battling in the strength of Christ against the evil one. That we want to see God's kingdom advance. Not just us coast through life.

[ 25 : 27 ] And as seemingly obvious as that spiritual battle is these days around us. I've got to be honest that often my heart is one that says not.

I'm ready to lay down my life. What can I give? But instead I'm ready to cling to my life. I really like it. But I'll do enough for others to assuage my guilt that I feel for loving my own life.

In other words, most days I'm advancing the kingdom of will. Most days when I wake up, the kingdom of will is on my radar and at the top of my list.

In fact, the kingdom of will includes serving others. It does because that's part of feeling good. And feeling like my kingdom is one that is good and generous. So I need to work a little serving into it somewhere.

And there's a big difference between that. Between waking up thinking how can my kingdom advance. And between saying I'm all in for his kingdom. For the advance of Jesus' kingdom.

[ 26 : 31 ] Where everything, absolutely everything in my life is up for grabs by King Jesus. For him to use it or change it for the good of his kingdom. That's very different, isn't it?

You can't have the kingdom without the king. It only works with me off the throne. And Jesus on it. I'm thankful one of the functions of singing songs in worship.

Is that it shapes our hearts for how we should feel about the king. And how our hearts should function. Not merely describing the ways that they always do and are.

Because we sang just a few minutes ago. I'd rather have Jesus. And I struggle with that. I struggle a lot with that.

I added some lyrics. They won't sing very well. But I wrestled through this song this week in my own heart. And I put some words to what's often the reality of this husband, father, pastor's heart.

[ 27 : 40 ] Basically what I realized is I'd love to have Jesus. But I'd like him to fit nicely into Will's kingdom. Alongside quite an impressive list of non-negotiables I don't want to give up.

I said I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold. I'd rather be his than have riches untold. As long as I have enough money not to have to worry about the things I need.

As well as some things to keep my kids happy. And still have enough to give some to Jesus. So I feel like I'm generous for the kingdom. I'd rather have Jesus than houses or land.

But I definitely need to have a safe place for my family. And a house sufficient enough that I feel good about my manliness. My ability to provide for my family. I really don't like the idea of leaving Huntsville or even our neighborhood.

Because we really like it here and we have lots of friends. So don't ask that. I'd rather be led by his nail pierced hand. Absolutely.

[ 28 : 45 ] As long as he doesn't lead me any of the places he went. When he suffered deeply for me. Because I hate pain. And I would like to avoid it if at all possible. I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause.

I'd rather be faithful to his dear cause. Honestly in a perfect world I'd like everyone to like me. Just makes things easier and more peaceful.

But at a minimum I absolutely must have my wife think I'm amazing. And enough people say nice things about me to keep me going. Otherwise I'm done. I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame. I'd rather be true to his holy name. Jesus the truth is I'd like to be true to your name as a way to gain notoriety for myself.

At least within circles of PCA pastors and churches. I'll use you for that in fact. If I'm faithful and this doesn't happen I'll be tempted to feel you've let me down.

[ 29 : 48 ] It doesn't have to be worldwide right now. But it needs to be trending in that direction. One step at a time. Then to be the king of a vast domain.

It doesn't have to be vast. But I have to have some sense of control. And even if I'm not the king people need to respect me and like my ideas. Change my plans and I'll get frustrated really fast.

Or be held in sin's dread sway. I know I should hate sin and dread its influence in my life.

Sometimes indulging in my angry feelings, my impure thoughts is something I enjoy.

And don't dread the impact of as I should. I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today. And I stopped here for a while.

And all I could think of is. Well apparently I'd really like to have Jesus fit right in. Alongside a really long list of things I want the world and the people in it to give me. I'll preach a sermon about you on Sunday Jesus.

[ 30 : 57 ] If you'll let me squeeze you into my kingdom the rest of the week. A lot of times that's what it feels like in my heart.

I don't know what the non-negotiables in your kingdom are. You may not have as many as I do. That's a good thing. But there are a lot of things my heart wouldn't change for Jesus apparently. We're asked every Thanksgiving since I've been here about hosting international students in our home on Thanksgiving. Many of whom don't know Jesus. And my first thought regularly is. You know family traditions are so important. We need Thanksgiving Day with our family. I wonder if any of them would like to come on the day after. That thought's gone through my head more than once.

I want to prioritize my kingdom. The things that have to go just this way. And I'll add Jesus in where it works. When it's convenient. I think Jesus says I have it backwards.

[ 32 : 00 ] It is not going to come up on that screen right now though. Tell you what. I have that backwards don't I? You've heard this one before. Matthew 6. But seek first his kingdom.

And his righteousness. And all these things will be added to you as well. All the things I tend to prioritize. The grace of my heavenly father has taken care of.

He's got those things for you. That's what it means for him to be your father. He says now go freely enjoy seeking my kingdom. Stop worrying about yours.

There's so many ways we can speak or show Jesus and his kingdom to our neighbors. There are people all around me who need to hear of Jesus. Who need to experience the power and reality of his kingdom.

And Jesus lets me share with them the grace he's shown to me. He lets me introduce them to him. Can you believe that? Can you believe that? The king who's taking care of me.

[ 33 : 00 ] Who's doing it all for me. He lets me introduce others to him. People who love Alabama football start getting excited when they hear that song I played earlier.

They start cheering. Their hearts start pumping. Their hands start clapping. They start focusing and tuning in on what's going on with their team. It's good stuff. They love to see it.

I want the music of the kingdom of God. The beauty of the reign of Jesus showing up in our relationships. In our schools when you see it in your neighborhood.

How about in your church? I want it to thrill your heart. I want you to feel the kingdom of God showing up and be thrilled. For it to make your heart and your hands start moving.

To excite you with passion. To see your team. His team. Doing something good. Seeing it advance. Seeing them succeed. And getting to rejoice in that.

[ 33 : 56 ] Where the needy experience the grace of Jesus meeting them where they are. When that's what excites the passions of our hearts. We'll do anything to be on the field.

And be a part of that team. And serve that king. Pray with me that God would do that in our hearts. God we do want that.

Our hearts are so confused some days. And divided. Because there's so many things we want. We want now to ask you by your spirit.

To give us an undivided heart. That would continue to turn from the things of ourselves. And thinking we've got to seek our own kingdom first.

Or else we won't make it. And give us a heart that longs for your kingdom. And for Jesus to be known. And experienced. And loved.

[ 34 : 52 ] Everywhere. And by everybody. Would that be our first desire? Would we be able to trust you as our father. To take care of the other things? We ask that you do that in our hearts.

And in our church. For the sake of your kingdom. Here and around the world. And we ask it in the name of King Jesus. Amen. For more information.

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