

Matthew 6:19-34 - Kingdom Priorities of Beloved Children

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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.

But we are going to look at Matthew chapter 6 this morning. I want to thank you one more time for the privilege of taking some time in study and prayer.

A couple of weeks ago was a really helpful time for me. I'm so excited next week to jump into the Gospel of Luke with you. Pray for that time. Read ahead if you like.

But regardless, be excited about what God will teach us there. But today we're actually going to look at a pretty familiar passage in the Gospel of Matthew. God has brought this passage to mind for me multiple occasions this summer as He has been teaching me and in my life the priority of heavenly realities.

The fact that eternal truths must impact today. That the reality of heaven has to shape and transform my earthly life.

[1 : 07] He's been teaching me that primarily through the book of Daniel as we've been in it. And in some other ways, I'll tell you more about that in a minute. But first let's read God's Word together.

This is Jesus speaking in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. You'll hear that theme of our priorities right away as we start reading in Matthew 6 at verse 19.

This is God's Word. In a world of broken promises, something completely reliable. In a world of rapidly changing realities, something eternally unchanging.

In a world of mess and folly, something entirely pure and right. Jesus says, 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.

[2 : 17] 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. 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 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.

[3 : 19] 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?

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. Will you pray with me? Father, thank you for your word. Thank you that it is not only true, but that it is the truth that we need.

That it speaks into our lives. That it changes our hearts. So Holy Spirit, use your word in our hearts to make us different.

[4 : 32] To show us Jesus. To strengthen our faith in Him. We ask that you would do it in Jesus' name. Amen. I want to bring you into a conversation that I had recently, and a conversation that brought this passage to mind for me again.

We were in our van, driving back from the beach at the end of vacation just last week. Summer is coming to an end, and I turned to my wife and asked what I thought was a seemingly innocent question.

So, what does this fall look like for us? Seemed like a good conversation starter. And so over the next few minutes, we did what many of you have done before.

You've had conversations like these. We start talking about all the things that are important to us and that are on our plates. And thinking of things like, of course, school starting. And there's teachers to get to know.

And wanting to volunteer in our kids' classrooms. And then there are small groups and Bible studies and friends at church that we want to deepen relationships with. Neighbors we ought to have over and we still haven't gotten to know.

[5 : 49] And others that we want to talk to about Jesus. And we need time with them. There's goals at work and a lot to be done. Projects that are getting started.

Home repairs that we need to talk about, have meetings about. And we start talking. I'm already starting to feel a little unclear how it's all going to happen unless there are more than seven days in any upcoming weeks.

My blood pressure is rising. How am I going to manage all of this? And then there's kids' activities. Is gymnastics or swimming or piano or ballet or art?

At least football is not on the list in our family. So we could cross that one off. You know, or maybe we could do both of those if we got the schedule to work out right and we figured out the carpooling. We could possibly fit them both into the plan for the fall. And I'll confess, as we started having this conversation, this thought literally went through my head. It was brief and I slapped myself.

[6 : 50] But I thought, we've been watching the Olympic trials. My girls love watching. The Olympics are coming up. You know what? If they're going to make the Olympic team in eight years, I'm going to need them full time in swimming and gymnastics.

We're already behind. How are they ever going to get that moment? That crossed my mind. Oh yeah, did someone say date night? Oh honey, I think I promised once upon a time that our relationship would be a priority.

That I would invest in that. It would be important. Good grief. Many of you have had those conversations and felt the anxiety build.

How am I going to figure out what to do? It may be a fall thing for you or it may not be. It may be a fall thing that you haven't gotten to yet because you're protesting having that conversation in July. But whether you're a planner like me or a more spontaneous type, I've realized that what often drives us when we have those conversations and make those decisions is what I'd call the tyranny of the urgent.

[7 : 56] You ever felt yourself driven by that? For many of us, when we get in conversations like I just described, everything feels urgent, doesn't it? How do I even know what's really important?

There's so much that we could do that sometimes we just shut those conversations down and go on with life and then we end up living by the tyranny of the urgent. Whatever feels most important to me in the moment when I get there, whatever I like or feel I need, what we want.

And after those conversations, that's often just Netflix or something to check out and not have to make any more decisions. That conversation in our van made me think of something my dad used to tell me a lot when I was growing up.

He used to say often, the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. That's what that silly little acronym in your bulletin stands for.

Jesus tells us that there is actually a priority for our lives as His followers. Something that ought to be primary in how we spend our time, our money, our energy.

[9 : 07] Now it doesn't make all the decisions for us, unfortunately. But I'm convinced it must be a part of our conversations and I for one often leave it out and let the tyranny of the urgent, my momentary priorities just rule the day.

If we can at least be making our decisions with the main thing is the main thing, we'll have gotten a good start. And we just read it. Jesus says to seek something first.

He actually tells us what's most important. Our priority, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Oh, right. Jesus should be a part of those conversations.

Heavenly realities are to shape and transform my earthly life every day, everything I do. You see, we know why Jesus needs to remind us to keep the main thing the main thing, don't we?

It's because we're consistently caught up worrying about other things. It's the universal problem Jesus addresses here in this passage, doesn't He? We struggle with worry and with anxiety because we are prone to be self-focused and self-reliant.

[10:28] You see, sometimes worry comes from having self-focused priorities, from placing an undue importance on the things of the world and what I want. That's why Jesus begins this passage talking about what we treasure.

That's the context of what He's saying. Laying up treasures in heaven instead of earth, verse 19 and 20. Of serving God instead of money, verse 24.

We worry about the things that are important to us, don't we? The things we treasure. You've never gotten anxious about something that's meaningless to you. Often our hearts have begun to treasure selfish things more than we should.

So Jesus says, verse 25, don't be anxious about your life, about your body. Verse 31, about what we will eat or drink or wear.

Don't be anxious. I'm concerned about me being fulfilled. About me being secure. That's what those verses mean.

[11:33] I struggle to treasure God and His kingdom and I naturally treasure myself and my kingdom. Things going how I want them to. That's one reason we worry.

But we also worry because we're prone to be self-reliant. The rest of the passage here where Jesus says multiple times, do not be anxious, do not be anxious, do not be anxious, is telling us not to be anxious about things that actually do matter.

They're important things, right? Food, clothing, and so forth. Those are needs that we do have. We may give them undue importance sometimes, but other times the problem is not so much that as that we give ourselves an undue burden to provide them.

And our anxiety comes from how I will meet my needs. Notice verse 27 makes this really clear.

Which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to His span of life?

You're not able, Jesus is saying. Your being anxious doesn't address your needs. You see, your health matters because God has given you life.

[12:51] But we worry about it as though we carry the burden of fixing the problem, of providing for ourselves what we need. And this is exactly the place Jesus wants spiritual realities to transform our lives.

Listen, it's not that that your health doesn't matter. That your need to eat or your need to be secure are unimportant to God. In fact, quite the opposite. He wants you to know that these concerns that are so heavy on your radar are also on His.

We have an extravagant provider. Our Heavenly Father delights to meet our needs faithfully and lavishly. It is this generous and caring heart of our Father that is of utmost importance in this passage.

It's the thing that it all hangs on. Notice how Jesus makes the point about how God cares for us through examples in nature, right? Verse 26, look at the birds of the air.

They are not doing it. They don't sow or reap or gather into barns. And yet, who does it? Your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

[14:06] Who's taking care of the birds? Your Heavenly Father. The One who gave you life and brought you into His family. He didn't just do that to let you starve.

Look how faithfully He cares for the birds. Day by day. Meal by meal. Even though they don't plant and till to provide for themselves. And then consider the lilies.

Verse 28, how they grow. They don't toil or 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, it's not going to last.

It doesn't have the eternal life with Him that you know. How will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? The lilies don't provide their own garments.

And yet God clothes them not just adequately, but beautifully. He displays His glory and His creativity and His creation, doesn't He? How much more will He do it for His children?

[15:18] It's that classic argument from the lesser to the greater. If He's done it for them, how much more can we trust Him to provide for His children whom He loves so much more than the grass and the birds?

We do not have a stingy or unreliable provider. We can trust our Father who delights to give good gifts to His children.

A pastor friend of mine tells the story of a young boy who was adopted into a family after spending the first few years of his life as an orphan.

Mistreated, malnourished, often going for long periods of time without being fed at all. And he loved his new family, loved being a part of it, loved the home.

But not long after he was adopted by his new family, the parents began to notice food missing from the fridge and the pantry. At first they didn't think anything of it, but as it became a pattern, they started to look around and investigate.

[16:28] What's going on? One day the father walked into his newly adopted son's bedroom and found him under the bed with a stockpile of food gathered around him.

And of course, the son explained what was going on, that he was fearful that this wonderful food he'd been receiving would stop being given to him, that it would run out, that it wouldn't be shared with him anymore.

It broke the father's heart, of course. It also gave the father an opportunity to reassure his son of what was really true.

He got to say to him, you're my son. You're part of this family now. This house is my house and all the food in it is mine.

And because of that, it is yours. It will always be yours and I will always make sure you have enough. You don't have to provide for yourself any longer.

[17:31] You're my son. So often we're like the little boy under the bed, aren't we? We're not confident in the provision of our father and we're anxious about providing for ourselves.

And Jesus says this morning something very important. It's not merely don't be anxious. But even more helpfully than that, it's you don't have to be anxious.

You don't need to be anxious. You see, Jesus understands why we are concerned about these things. And he knows that just telling someone to worry, to stop worrying, probably won't help things.

You know that if you've ever been worried. Stop worrying! That just makes it worse, doesn't it? If that's all that you're told, you start to obsess over the thing that you're worried about and I can't stop thinking about it.

Jesus says something more. He says, I want you to know you don't need to be anxious. Everything you truly need, your heavenly father will provide faithfully and lavishly.

[18:43] Listen to how Jesus closes the argument verse 31. Verse 31. Therefore, do not be anxious saying, what shall we eat or drink or wear? Why? For the Gentiles seek after all these things and your heavenly father knows that you need them all.

He's not scolding you. Stop worrying about eating. You don't need to eat. Now, what's he saying? Don't be anxious about what you're going to eat.

The most extravagant provider in all the world is your father and he knows what you need even better than you do.

You don't have to be anxious about it. I know you're concerned about being fulfilled and secure, he says. I'm not scolding you for wanting your family to be provided for, but I want you to know that I am the extravagant provider, not you.

I know you need all those things. It's those without a father who have to chase after these things, but you've been adopted. You have a caring and generous father who provides even for those outside his family, birds, lilies, Gentiles, and so especially for his own children.

[20:09] His eye is on the sparrow, even the sparrow, so you can know he's watching you. Here's the really exciting part of that.

For those of you like me having those conversations in your van and getting anxious and not knowing anything to do with the worry and the anxiety and not knowing how to make any decisions for what should be important in the midst of all the busyness.

Jesus says that the reason I want you to know that your heavenly Father is providing for all those other needs is so you can keep the main thing, the main thing. Verse 33.

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

Having an extravagant provider as your Father frees us.

It sets us free to have refocused priorities. Our passions and lives now can and must be shaped by kingdom priorities. Imagine that little boy under the bed again, right?

[21 : 19] He's been every spare moment because of his past, he's had to spend his time and energy scheming how he can gather more food to provide for himself.

It's all he can think about and dream about but now he doesn't have to anymore. Now he knows his Father has him covered. He's got time and energy to spare.

Now we are freed up to dream not about ourselves and making our lives better and how we can move up a little bit but about God's kingdom and how we can advance it.

And Jesus says that's actually the treasure. That's actually what's most important. This is the priority. You can focus on the priority without fear of causing harm to yourself.

All these things you tend to worry about, those things your Heavenly Father knows you need, they will be added to you. Pardon me for a minute, I'm a grammar nerd.

[22 : 22] will be added is in the passive voice. It's a beautiful passive because it's what's called a divine passive. It's passive because you don't see the subject of the sentence.

Who's doing the adding? The divine passive is God is doing the adding. God will see to it that those things are added to you.

Your Heavenly Father knows you need those things and will take care of you. And so, knowing that our time is valuable, Jesus directs us here on what the priority is that must shape our decisions.

It's the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Now that may sound like old news to you. Boy, that was profound, Will. I didn't expect to hear that at church today.

The importance of God and righteousness. I'd suggest it may be old news, but it's not second nature to us to live with that kind of kingdom priority.

[23 : 25] We have other priorities pushed on us all the time, don't we? The news media would 24-7 have us believe that the political conventions are what's most important in life.

That international economy or celebrity lifestyles are most important. Social media is 24-7 telling us that how we look is what's most important.

Looking like an all-American family. And that our kids should be priority number one. And so, what we feed them or don't feed them, whether we vaccinate them or don't vaccinate them, parent them this way or that way, it all hinges on that.

You've got to get it right or you've failed. It's going to determine all the rest of their life and whether or not they're successful. Listen, Jesus says to our anxious hearts, let me cut through the confusion and the anxiety.

Seek first the kingdom of God. You don't know how to sort out the top priority right now? Let me do it for you. Me, the one who created this whole world and you to live in it, I'll tell you, seek first the kingdom of God.

[24 : 37] And now we're set free, aren't we? Our hearts, our creativities, our time is set free to serve the kingdom with what some would look at and say is reckless abandon.

They're not being wise. But we can do that because we know that our heavenly Father is meeting all our needs. See, I'm not just talking about churchy stuff here.

That's not all the kingdom of God means. Seek first the kingdom is much bigger than this building or this day of the week. What does it mean to seek first the kingdom?

Just a few thoughts to get you going. At work, it means rather than just working to see how you can make more money at the end of this year, you can invest some of your time to address broken systems and unrighteous practices in your industry.

It also means practicing honesty and integrity in your business rather than cutting corners to get ahead. With your free time, it means rather than getting to the gym every single night of the week to perfect your body just the way you'd like, you can find yourself in the Oscar Mason Center perhaps one or two nights a week.

[25 : 57] Investing in the life of a Jobs for Life student. What about in your relationships? It means rather than focusing all your relational energies on those who will make you look good and feel good about yourself, boy, we like to do that.

We're free to invest in those who can't repay us. It also means we move intentionally towards those who don't know the king. It also means we use our tongues to protect and build up rather than slander and tear down those he made in his image.

What about spiritually? What about church stuff? It means investing in your relationship with King Jesus. That it's important in your relationship with your heavenly father who is caring for you.

Maybe something else is going to have to go so that a small group Bible study fits this fall. Maybe corporate worship does need to be more of a priority for you.

Maybe you can sacrifice a little sleep to be with your father and trust him to meet your need for daily strength. It also means longing and praying for his kingdom to come.

[27 : 13] How about parenting? I've picked on parents a little and included myself and my Olympic dreams in that mix. I think it's really important for us as parents here.

It's vital for us to remember that we are not the only ones with a heavenly father. Remember the sign of the covenant promises that we placed on little faith just a few minutes ago?

This passage means that our kids have a heavenly father too. An extravagant provider for them. And not one that is you or me.

It's their heavenly father. And that means priorities as a parent are not merely making money to put food on the table and clothes on my kids' backs. Not merely shopping for clothes and cooking food. But, even more than that, teaching them the truths of God's words so that they know their heavenly father. Exposing their hearts to the glories of the gospel.

[28 : 20] Sacrificing and serving alongside our kids for the extension of the kingdom so they see what's most important. Helping them learn to love others different from them the way the king loves us.

How about that for this school year? Things our kids need need to be reminded of. You see, the vision of Southwood is to advance the kingdom of God.

And that doesn't mean only in this place, only on Sundays. That means every moment of every day in all of life, all of us, to advance God's kingdom.

We're called to seek first His kingdom, to long for, pray for, and work for a world that reflects His righteous character everywhere. Some of us need to go back and have that anxiety-inducing van conversation all over again from a different perspective.

That's our priority this fall. It's going to look different for every one of us, but regardless of what it looks like, the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

[29 : 34] And in this passage, the main thing is to experience the extravagant love of our Heavenly Father. See, most religions and sadly, even many Christian churches tell you to seek God first and do kingdom stuff and if you do it well enough, God will take care of you.

He'll provide everything you need if you just seek Him hard enough and well enough. Biblical Christianity says, before you sought God at all, He sought you and loved you so much, He sent His Son to die for you.

How do you know that you're more valuable than the birds, more important to Him than the lilies? Romans 8, He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also along with Him graciously give us all things?

Listen, He has already made you His sons and daughters. You're not auditioning with how well you seek the kingdom. He has already made you His sons and daughters.

Jesus says, He is your heavenly Father. He will provide faithfully and lavishly. He has met your greatest need in sending His Son to be your Savior, your substitute.

[31 : 01] You can trust Him to meet all of your other needs. He is, after all, your Father. And so He and His kingdom are worth seeking above all else.

If selfish people like you and me are going to have our hearts changed to the point that we'll be willing to reorder our priorities and reshape our lives for the sake of the King, the main thing we need ringing in our ears and hearts this week is the soul-freeing good news that our Heavenly Father is caring for us and holding us in His hands.

We've heard it sung once beautifully, this morning. It's captured really well in the words of this children's song by Rain for Roots that James is going to come and sing for us now.

As James sings these words, listen to these simple and beautiful words and consider God's Word to you this morning. See the birds you are singing in the spring air giving everything they need they don't worry where the next meal will come from they don't worry about a thing so just look around

you and try to listen to the song creation sings don't you worry cause you're in the hands of the God who made everything

She's not See the flowers in your colorful beauty.

[33 : 26] They're dressed better than the king. They don't worry about what they should wear, no. They don't worry about a thing.

So just look around you and try to listen to the song creation sings. Don't you worry cause you're in the hands of the God who made everything.

You're not a bird and you're not a flower and you don't have petals and wings. But there's good news you were so much more to the God who made everything.

Oh. So when you worry about today or tomorrow and the storms that they might bring.

Do remember that you're in the hands of the God who made everything. So just look around you and try to listen to the song creation sings.

[34 : 54] Don't you worry cause you're in the hands of the God who made everything. God who made everything.

You're in the hands of the God who made everything. For more information visit us online at southwood.org.

Thank you. Thank you.