

Vision Month 2025 - Jesus and our priorities

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[0:00] Well, good morning, everybody. We're looking at Matthew chapter 6 today, Matthew chapter 6 verses 19 to 34. Just to explain that October is traditionally now in this church our vision month. And we remind ourselves, and you can only see it in the back if you're looking from here.

But those in the church know that this is our vision statement, that as followers of Jesus, we direct our lives around three objectives.

We seek to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus did. So I hope you can discover from that that our emphasis in this church is about relationships.

Okay? Very often people will say of us that we're religious. But we're not religious for the sake of ritual. And many of us don't like the term religion because it has so many negative connotations. What we want to show people is that we follow Jesus. His life, his influence, his teaching, his example. 2,000 years on, which is still the greatest example in all the world of how to live life, seeking to do for others what you would have them do for you.

[1:27] Seeking to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And to love your neighbor as yourself. And all of that wonderful teaching that so transformed the world and keeps transforming it all of these years later.

So we're going to look at what Jesus teaches today in Matthew chapter 6 about priorities. I don't know how many times over the years people have said, Well, John, you've got to get your priorities right.

Has anybody said that to you? Yeah, it's usually when Newcastle are about to play and it's dinner time. And I'm supposed to have dinner with the family, but I want to watch Newcastle.

So I'm told I have to get my priorities right. Perhaps you've been told that too. Watching Newcastle is getting my priorities right, I often think, but not everybody agrees.

So let's read the scripture together. Matthew chapter 6, we're going to read from verse 19. It's going to come up on the screen. Verse 19.

[2:34] Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness. No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and money. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear.

Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or store away in the barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

[3:51] Are you not much more valuable than me? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes?

See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you?

O you of little faith. So do not worry, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all of these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.

Each day has enough trouble of its own. Amen. And the Lord will bless to us the reading of his word. So Jesus and our priorities.

[5:05] As I say, this series forms the basis of our vision month. When we're reminding ourselves that as followers of Jesus, we unite around those three main purposes of being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, and doing what Jesus did.

And that's going to lead us to consider, in terms of our priorities, what we should be focusing on as Christian believers.

So we're going to think about a life committed to sharing the good news of Jesus. A mind transformed by the good news of Jesus.

And a heart energized by love for Jesus. Jesus. But today I want to speak to you just about priorities. Our priorities and our treasures.

Our priorities and our treasures. Jesus here in Matthew chapter 6 speaks about our treasures. So what is a treasure?

[6:12] Well, a treasure is something you value most, isn't it? It's something you place the greatest importance upon. It's also something you hoard, just whatever else might be your tricks, or your drawers, or anything else, or your clothes cupboard, or whatever else might be your treasure.

It's something you aim hard at getting, and then make every effort to protect, whatever the cost. Now the word treasures, of course, is a very comprehensive word.

It can include money, jewelry, or gold. You might have a lot of that, or you might have very little of it. But it might also include a person, like a husband or a wife.

You might even call your husband or your wife your treasure. More likely, of course, it will involve a child, my little treasure. Or my mom used to call me her baby, even when I was 50-something. It might include an heirloom that you have, your house. But it might also include things like your status, your reputation, your position.

[7:24] It might include your athletic prowess, or your intellectual ability, or your practical skills. It might involve your memories.

It might involve your memories. The things you treasure. The people you treasure who have now gone. Your particular achievements. Treasures are, therefore, very good things.

We all like them. We all want them. Jesus says, don't worry about them. Don't worry about your treasures. Why not?

Because whatever we treasure, we fear losing. Don't we? We think we can't live without them. Or without it. Many of us think like that.

Those who've been married for a long time and lose their loved one, wonder how they're going to manage. It's understandable. You've lived with somebody for so long, and you've shared your life, and they're very precious to you.

[8:26] Then you lose them. And you think, how can I go on? So what does Jesus mean when he says, don't worry about them? He means, don't get distracted by them.

That's what the original Greek word means. Don't get distracted by your treasures. Either by worrying about them, or by allowing them to dominate and control your thinking and your way of living.

For example, the person who worries about money has an excessive regard for it. They worry about losing it, so they work very hard to make sure they never lose it.

They hope the bank does the same. Or they just work too hard to get more, even though they've got enough. And in some cases, some people have enough to live ten lives on, but still act as if they need more.

It's funny that, isn't it? How people who have so much money become so tight with it, and don't want to let it go or share it.

[9:39] And it's the same with whatever we treasure. We might fear losing our athletic ability. We might fear getting old. As I say, we might fear losing a loved one, because we wonder how we will survive.

And we get distracted, desperately holding on to things that God has never promised will last forever. And that's the point about treasures. That's why Jesus said, don't get distracted by them. Don't worry about them. Because he says, they're like lilies in the field or birds of the air. See, lilies in the field, they look beautiful for a time, but they die eventually.

They are temporary things. So are the birds of the air. So are you and I. Temporary things, here today, gone tomorrow.

And so Jesus encourages us not to get distracted by treasures, but actually to just weigh up our lives and look at our lives from a proper, God-focused perspective.

[10:43] Just as the heavenly Father clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the birds of the air, so he will take care of you. So he says, don't worry. Don't get distracted.

And it's lovely, isn't it, to think of Jesus kind of walking with his disciples in the field and saying, look at that. Look at that. Look at those birds feeding there.

Your heavenly Father feeds them. Look at those flowers in the field. Your heavenly Father clothes them. Aren't they beautiful? See, when you get absorbed in the things that God has made, you don't have time to worry about tomorrow.

That's the point. Now, we're never told that Jesus smiled in the Bible, not once. We're told that he got very sad, that he got very distressed, but never told that he smiled.

But you mustn't think he never smiled. It's hard to imagine him telling this story to his disciples and getting them to focus on these wonderful things that God has made and not smiling.

[11:43] And that's the thing about life, you see. People who excessively worry never enjoy today, do they? Because they're always worrying about what might be tomorrow. Jesus says, look, take a moment to just look at the wonderful things God has provided.

Just learn to enjoy them. Because you've got them today. But you might not have them tomorrow. So instead of worrying about what might be, thank God for what is.

That's a God-shaped perspective. Thank God for what is. Today you're healthy. Today you're well. Today you've got your loved ones around you.

Today you've got so much to enjoy. Thank God for it. Don't worry about losing it. Thank God for it. That's a God-shaped perspective on life.

So we need to adopt that right perspective, don't we? And in the context of Matthew 6, Jesus draws our attention to the kinds of things that people worry about, but he doesn't draw our attention to luxuries, just the basics.

[13:00] What you shall eat, what you shall drink, what you shall wear. Just the basic needs of life, the everyday things. And why does he do that?

Because we can't survive without those things. We need things to eat, things to drink, things to wear, don't we? We need those. So what is he doing here?

He's saying, look, your heavenly Father will provide them. But don't worry about them. Don't get distracted by them. Don't let them take up all your time.

Even these basics of life. Well, you say, I've got to work to provide for my family. Of course you do. He knows that. I've got to put clothes on their back. Of course you do. He knows that.

But he says, don't spend your time excessively controlled by the need to provide the basics in life. Instead, trust your heavenly Father who will provide them.

[14:00] So you say, well, of course, Jesus is speaking to people who are very rich and get kind of caught up, make gods of their stuff.

No, he's not. He's speaking to us all. You have to worry about everyday stuff. And he says, don't allow stuff to become your God.

Don't let stuff or things or obsessions with things become idols that take you away from your heavenly Father.

I like football, but it mustn't be my obsession. There are some people that so make it their obsession that it becomes everything to them.

Like the Newcastle supporter who was told once by his wife, you think more of Newcastle than you do of me. To which he replied, I think of Sunderland more than I, more of Sunderland than I do of you.

[15:06] Which is a real insult, but just a joke. But sometimes we men give the impression that we think more of our jobs than we do of our wives.

More of our money than we do of our wives. More of our hobbies than we do of our wives. And vice versa. We get caught up with stuff.

But Jesus goes one step further and says, don't think of these things more than you think of your heavenly Father. Don't allow them to distract you so you make a God of them and you lose your focus upon God.

And isn't that the problem with the modern world? We have so much stuff that we worship it and we think we've got to have more of it and we think we can't be happy without it.

And yet we look around the world and we see people in the most impoverished places in the world who put God first. And it's one of those intriguing dilemmas, isn't it?

[16:13] Those sort of ironies that those who have so little of this world goods are so often focused upon God in a way that we are not because we have so much and we forget the one who gave us it.

Every good and perfect gift, the Bible says, comes down from the Father of lights in whom there is no shadow of turning.

The problem in the West is people say, I don't have time for church. I don't have time to worship. I don't have time for fellowship. The reason is I'm working so much, you see. That tells you a lot about priorities.

That tells you a lot about their priorities. Jesus is saying, where is your priority? What are you focusing on? What distracts you?

What obsesses you? Is it stuff or is it God? Are you seeking first your own kingdom or seeking first the kingdom of heaven? It's tough, isn't it?

[17:20] That's a hard challenge. But it's a challenge for us all. The second thing I want us to notice is that our priorities need to be influenced by Jesus' example.

Just in case you need a slide. Is the slide stuck? Our priorities needs... Oh, let me say something about this first. This is important, this. Quite a little thing. I found this.

This is the cathedral in Milan. Milan. And it's the facade of the cathedral in Milan. And it has three inscriptions above the door. Over a reef of roses, it has the inscription, All that pleases is but for a moment.

Like roses. Beautiful, but they don't last long. Over the next pillar, it has, All the troubles is but for a moment.

And that is over an inscription of the cross. Jesus went to the cross. He suffered massively. But all that troubles is but for a moment. But then in the central entrance, it has the written, That only is important, which is eternal.

[18:36] And that's Jesus' point. The stuff that we worry about, the stuff that distracts us, the stuff that keeps us from putting God first in our life, is the stuff that is temporary.

But the thing that lasts forever is God. Therefore, put God first. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. And Jesus says, Then all that other stuff will be added to you as well.

If you get your priorities right, everything will be okay. All right, next slide. So our priorities in Jesus' example.

We prioritize what we think we need most, don't we? I need this, so I'm going to work hard for it. I need this, so I'm going to get onto Amazon and buy it instantly, and it will be delivered tomorrow. Why did it take so long? What's happened? Why can't they deliver it today? Well, they're even doing that in some cases now, if they're living here enough.

[19:44] It's quite amazing, isn't it? Remember when it used to take a week or something, or a month? But we've got to have it, and we've got to

have it now. Who sends letters anymore? We send emails.

We get them instantly. So we prioritize what we think we need most. Often the things we need most are the things we crave as well, aren't they?

So we crave things. We think we need them to fulfill our lives. That's why we get obsessed with stuff. So, exercise is good, isn't it?

Yeah? Excessive exercise is not healthy. It might harm your health and your well-being, because your body needs time to recover. Some people obsessively exercise in order to look brilliant.

They want to have highly toned muscles. They want to look gorgeous. They want to be like some Adonis. Guess what they're doing?

[20:43] They're worshiping their bodies. It has become obsessive. It's no longer about health. It's about how I look. It's about self-gratification.

See, these things easily happen, like the football fan who gets obsessed with football, or the person who gets obsessed with money. Not because they need it anymore, but they just need to feel better about themselves.

But the amazing thing about all of that is, it never satisfies. The obsessions become greater, so they need to try harder to worship at the shrine of their God.

And Jesus, in contrast, says, let me tell you what you should prioritize. In Matthew chapter 13, and verses 45 to 46, he gives two very short parables.

He says this, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure. There is a slide for this. The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy, went and sold all he had and brought that field.

[21:48] Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he'd brought it. What's the point? The point is, the kingdom of heaven is so immensely precious that it should become the most important thing in your life.

To such an extent that if you get hold of the kingdom of heaven, you should never let it go. You should be prepared to sell everything, to give everything away, to get this immense treasure. Why? Because if you become a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, to use the language of Jesus, if you are born again into the kingdom of heaven, you have eternal life.

And you shall never perish. And you shall never lose your inheritance. Now, that's not true of anything you possess here on earth. Everything you possess here on earth will go to somebody else.

And when the preacher announces that you were born with nothing and you die with nothing, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Naked I came into this world and naked shall I return.

[23:00] That's absolutely the case. Everything else goes to somebody else. So Jesus says, look, receiving eternal life, becoming a member of the kingdom of heaven is the most important thing you could ever have.

And it's so important that nothing should get in the way of its possession. And once you get hold of it, you should never give it up. And so he lives that out in his own example and he encourages us to follow that example to make that which is eternal your priority.

Seek first the kingdom of heaven and his righteousness and all of these things shall be added to you as well. So important. There's a wonderful little book if you've never read by Mitch Albom called Tuesdays with Morrie.

It's a story of an old Jewish lecturer who is dying and he's sharing his, what he's learned about life. And the person who's speaking to him is a journalist and he's writing his life.

And this is what he says of him. This is what he reports. Morrie says to him one day. Part of the problem, he says, is that everyone is in such a hurry.

[24:28] People haven't found meaning in their lives. So they're running all the time looking for it. They think the next car, the next house, the next job. Then they find these things are empty too and they keep running.

It's true, isn't it? We think we've got to have things to be fulfilled and satisfied. But we find they don't satisfy. Jesus says, seek first my kingdom.

Let me tell you there is something that will satisfy you that the world cannot give you. And once you get hold of, you will never want to give up. Seek first the kingdom.

And that helps us to re-evaluate our treasures. See, when I lose something or lose someone, I could get very bitter and twisted about that and get very angry.

I could get very angry with the world, get very angry with others. I could become a joyless person to be around. I could blame everybody and get frustrated. I could become a grumpy old man.

[25:35] But then, I have lost sight of the fact that God never promised me that I would have those things forever. Or I could say, well, the Lord gave.

And the Lord is taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. That would at least help me to cope with things that I lose much better, wouldn't it?

But that re-evaluation on life, that God is good all the time and all the time God is good, extends to those things that are not good in themselves. because I have inherited a kingdom that never ends, where all that is bad that has happened to me in this world will be compensated for in the life to come, and where I will discover that there was even a reason for their loss as well, to keep me entirely focused upon the thing that matters, which is God and His kingdom.

God loves me too much to let me find my heaven on earth. He wants me to keep focused forever on His kingdom. So Jesus teaches us to re-evaluate our lives, and He models His example to us of what this will mean.

What was His life like? He lived it in full dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Everything He did, He did in the power of the Holy Spirit, and so should we.

[27:08] He lived it with a complete commitment to prayer in His life and ministry. ministry, and so should we. He taught us the importance, there is a slide for this by the way, the importance of obedience to His Father's will, and so should we.

He taught us the centrality of God's Word on His life and ministry, and that should be our commitment. He taught us to desire and glorify God the Father just as He did, and so should we. and He developed loving and grace-filled relationships where He sought to point people to God, and so should we. These should be our priorities.

The things that Jesus modeled, the example He left us, should be the one that we should follow. For as 1 John 2 verse 6 says, whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did.

that's why we talk about our relationship with Jesus. Let Him be our example. Let Him be the one we follow. And so thirdly, our priorities and prioritizing the kingdom of God.

[28:27] Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5 15 that Jesus died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and was raised to life.

This is Paul's challenge, if you like. Live for the one who died for you. And when you think, how much should I give?

How much should I surrender? Well, there's your model. Live for the one who died for you. Be willing to die for Him. Be willing to give your all for Him.

For He gave His all for you. That's the great challenge. And so, what does that look like? Well, it means this. Next slide. Desire love for God above all other things.

Love for God. When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment, He said, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

[29:32] And one of the interesting things about that word strength is that strength does not refer to, primarily, to physical power. It refers to the things that make you strong in life, which can then be your wealth, can be your intellect, can be your reputation.

He's saying, love God with everything you possess, with everything that makes you proud of yourself, with everything that makes you feel that your life is worth living.

Love your God with it. Don't love yourself with it. That's the difference between self-made people and God-made people. Self-made people think they owe everything they have to their own skills and prowess.

God-made people thank God every day that He has given them what they possess. Love the Lord your God with it. Don't be a self-worshipper.

Be a God-worshipper. And if you love God with everything you possess, you will love your neighbor as yourself. The two follow. We can only truly love other people, especially in an unconditional way where we don't judge them for the things that they've done, where we don't condemn them because they have not reached our standards in life.

[30:56] But we love them unconditionally with the love that God has for them in spite of what they've done, however bad they've been. We love them for Jesus' sake.

We do that when we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And secondly, it means put God's interests above your own.

To seek God's kingdom first means to put His interests first. Now, how does that work out? That works out when a beggar meets you on the street and asks you for change.

Well, you say they might be feeding their addiction. They might be, but love them. You might think, well, they deserve what they've got where they are.

I've got no time for them. Well, they might deserve what they've got, but you should have time for them. It might mean loving the person who has hurt you, really hurt you, betrayed you, defamed you, and you want to get revenge.

[32:10] But in your heart, the Spirit of God says, forgive. Why should I forgive? Think of what they've done to me. Jesus says, Father, forgive them from the cross, for they do not know what they are doing.

The love of God works out in such a way that it says to us, put the interests of the kingdom of God before your own, before yourself.

Don't ever allow yourself to think that you are exempt from caring and loving others, regardless of what they may have done for you.

So loving God and putting the interests of the kingdom first means love and care for others. It means make the most of your time, redeem the time for the days are evil, remember that it is God's time and not yours.

He has given you it. He wants you to use it. It means to seek to discern God's will first in your life, to put his interests first, and to do what he wants for you.

[33:26] And it means cultivating a strong and intimate relationship with God. As God said to Abraham in Genesis 17, verse 1, I am God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless.

So he says to us, I am God Almighty. Walk before me. That means walk habitually before me every day.

Walk with integrity, knowing that you are always in my presence and be blameless and complete in obedience to me. Walk before me and be blameless. Why?

Because every time you walk out in the streets and every time you speak to another about Jesus and every time you do whatever you do, you represent Jesus in the world.

Why do people tell you they're not Christian? Because they don't like Christians. Why don't they like Christians? Very often they'll say because they're hypocritical.

[34:26] because they do bad things. What does that show? It shows that every time we walk out we represent Jesus. But wouldn't it be better if people met us and they say, I want to be a Christian because I see the love of God in that person.

I want to be a Christian because I hear the wisdom of God in that person. I want to be a Christian because I know that person puts God before anything in their life.

I want to be a Christian in other words because you are seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all other things are added to you. I want to be a Christian because your priorities are for Jesus.

So my friend, what are your priorities? do you need to get them right? Since then you've been raised with Christ.

Set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above not on earthly things for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

[35:45] When Christ who is your life appears, you will appear with Him in glory. Let me issue you a challenge. Tomorrow morning when you get up ask yourself what will I do for Jesus today?

There's a fad that's going around at the moment it's called the five minute rule and the five minute rule is this. you commit for five minutes a day to do something good for somebody.

Commit for five minutes to do something good. I thought that's a really good thing to do. Take five minutes because people say I haven't got time to be good. Well take five minutes do something good but I'm going beyond that.

I'm saying get up tomorrow and ask yourself Jesus what will you have me to do today or what can I do to follow your example today?

And then read something from the gospel. Find something that Jesus did and then say today I'm going to try and do that. Whatever that might be.

[37:07] An act of kindness an act of generosity a prayer an act of healing an act of cleansing whatever it might be ask yourself can I bring cleansing and healing into the lives of somebody today?

He who follows Jesus must then walk as he walked. Let us pray.