

Seek first the Kingdom of God

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[0:00] All right, well, we've already had the theme. It's been coming through in all of the songs. The importance of seeking first the kingdom of God.

And we've already read that verse from Matthew chapter 6. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

I think sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking, well, that's for the future. That the kingdom of God that we're praying to come is something that is going to be kind of physical reality sometime in the future.

Now, there is an aspect of the teaching of Jesus on the kingdom of God, which is future. The final form, if you like, of the kingdom of heaven is still to come.

But the kingdom of God has come and is coming. And when we pray, thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven, we are actually praying that every day God's kingdom will manifest in our world and in our lives.

[1:16] That as we do the will of the Father on earth, as it is done in heaven, so the kingdom of God will come with power. And with this in mind, Luke 17, 20, 21.

It's on the screen. Once having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God will come, Jesus replied, the kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation.

Nor will people say, here it is or there it is. Because the kingdom of God is within you. Or it can be translated in your midst.

And Jesus, to summarize the teaching of Jesus, mainly in this passage, and there's more to teaching on the kingdom of God than this, just the next slide will kind of give you a quick rundown. For Jesus then, the kingdom of God was not primarily a physical entity. It was a spiritual thing. It comes with power as the gospel is preached.

[2:18] It comes into the hearts of men and women. The kingdom of God, he says, will not come with observation. You won't see it over there. And then all form an orderly cue to get in. The kingdom of God is within you.

And the reason for that is that the kingdom of God grows spiritually in the hearts of people. Jesus told a parable about the mustard seed.

Matthew 13, 31, 32. He told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.

So the kingdom of God grows within us, like the mustard seed. It starts small, grows big, but actually, notice as well, has a purpose.

The purpose is to ensure the birds of the air have somewhere to nest. When Jesus works in our life and produces his salvation in our lives, it's for a reason, not something to keep to ourselves, but to give our lives away for the service of others.

[3:30] And the kingdom of God is brought into the world by Jesus. When he came and began his gospel ministry, Mark 1, 15 says, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent and believe. It's come. The king has come. The gospel has been preached, and people have been invited into the kingdom of God. And Nicodemus discovered that you enter the kingdom of God by being born again, born from above.

Yeah? It is a spiritual entity, not a physical thing. It is in the hearts of us, and it is in the hearts of us, and the intention is that the kingdom of God will become evident in our lives.

We are built, says Dallas Willard, we are built to live in the kingdom of God. It is our natural habitat. Now, here's a secret about the world in which we live. There are two kingdoms, Jesus essentially

says, when you boil them all down.

There are two kingdoms of this world. There is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. Matthew uses the word heaven rather than God. It's the same thing. Or there is the kingdom of this world, which is under the control of the evil one.

[4:42] So there is a spiritual dimension to life that too many people sadly are not aware of. But ultimately the control is not in the hands of Donald Trump, for which we say thank God.

It is in the hands, and that's not to denigrate Donald Trump. I could have said Putin or anybody else, by the way. I'm not being disrespectful there. Just thank God the world is not in the control of human leaders with all of their fallibility.

Or it is under the sway of the evil one. And that reality gets played out every day. Look at the evil in the world. It gets played out every day.

And evil is conquered with good. Darkness is conquered with light. You see an act of kindness. How does that make you feel? Even in this modern world, God has shown us a glimpse.

Evil will be conquered by good, by kindness, by love, by grace in this world. All evil ever does is destroy.

[5:41] Martin Luther King said that, didn't he? Darkness will not overcome light. Darkness will only ever produce darkness. It will only produce hate. It will only produce violence.

So where is the kingdom of God then in this world? Where is it in this world? Where can you find it? You find it in the lives of those who live within it. You see it operating there.

As Dallas Willard says, It is the range of God's effective will. When we pray, Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, you are praying, Lord, let your kingdom come to my life and let it work out in the world, in the range of my responsibility, among the people that I mix with, the people that I speak to, the people whose lives I can make a difference to.

Let your kingdom build within me and flow out from me so that your power and glory is felt among those I come across.

We bring the kingdom of God into the world through our lives. The kingdom of God comes with the power of the gospel, which is the power of the gospel of the kingdom.

[7:00] And that means that our lives are really important. We're building a kingdom. A kingdom that is not of this world. A kingdom that cannot fail.

A kingdom of God. A kingdom of heaven. How powerful is that? We're not meant to be hiding away. We have supernatural power to transform this world as we live under the influence and in the power of the kingdom of God.

It's quite something, isn't it? We are heirs of the kingdom and we represent the king here on earth. Eric Little, remember him, the famous chariots of fire runner?

He says, I feel God when I run. God makes me fast, he said. And he won the Olympic medal, didn't he? When he refused to run on a Sunday for he didn't want to dishonor God.

He put God first. He refused to run on a Sunday and he ran an event that he did not think was his event. It was not his event. He should not have won it. And yet he won it because he says, God makes me fast.

[8:07] But this is something else he said. What is less known about him, he died in China. When he finished his athletics, he went to be a missionary. He went to China and the war broke out and he was put in a concentration camp.

He became very sick there but he preached the gospel to the prisoners and God used him wonderfully there. And this is what he says about his life. The kingdom is where the king reigns. If he is reigning in my heart, then the kingdom of heaven has come to me.

If he is reigning in my heart, then the kingdom of heaven has come to me. When I pray your kingdom come, Lord, I am praying, Lord, reign in my heart. Seek first the kingdom of God, Jesus says.

Above all else, and live righteously. Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all other things shall be added as well.

So lessons for us to draw out. First, seek. Don't drift. Jesus did not say, drift into the kingdom of God and just paddle there and see how you feel and if you don't like it, get out again.

[9:18] That's how some people treat the Christian message. I'll give it a try. If it doesn't work, I'll try something else. That's not how you find God. Not, well, God, I'll come to you conditionally.

If you satisfy me and meet all my needs, then I will follow you and you'll be very grateful. No, no, no, no, no. It calls for us to die, for us to surrender, for us to give him first place, to make him king, to put him at the center of our lives.

As Jonathan Edwards says, the seeking of the kingdom of God is the chief business of the Christian life. When I get up in the morning, Lord, your kingdom come in my life today.

Lord, be my king today. Be in control. Somebody's in control of your life. As Bob Dylan famously says, we've all got to serve someone.

The question is who we're serving. Are we serving consumerism, materialism, wealth, health, all of that kind of thing? Are we serving ourselves? Or are we serving God?

[10 : 25] I know who I'd rather serve. Seek first the kingdom of God. And that calls us to reorder our priorities. And the important thing about it in the teaching of Jesus is he's saying in effect, look, life is something you worry about all of the time.

You worry about what you shall eat, what you shall drink, what you shall put on. You worry about how you're going to fill your life. He says, don't worry about that. Your heavenly father knows what you need.

So trust him. Next slide. Trust him. God will provide for us if we put him first. I can worry about what I'm going to fill my life with, or I can begin the day, and I'm beginning the day with a lot of verses. I realize I don't actually manage all of these verses. Or I can begin the day like this. My God shall supply all my needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4.19. That's about whom I trust. God will provide if we put him first.

[11 : 29] God will abundantly bless if we put him first. Proverbs 10.22. The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it. I was talking to a brother in Christ the other day.

He's not here, so he won't mind me mentioning it. And he said this quite interesting thing to me. He said, do you know, I discovered, he said, that when I decided that I was going to give to God, I've never been better off than now.

Once he decided he was going to give to God, he said, I've never been richer. Now, he did mean it materially, but that's true of our lives in general.

We might be very poor, and we may not be able to give much to God, and that's okay, but the blessing of God makes us rich. It gives us value. It gives us hope.

It gives us confidence to face this world. God is no man's debtor, and he will never allow his children to beg bread. Psalm 37.45 says, delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

[12 : 41] Commit your way to the Lord, and trust in him, and he will do it. You say, I'm not happy. I don't know how to get on in my life. I feel so miserable. I make such a mess of it.

God says, commit it to me. Trust in me, and I will give you the desires of your heart. Without embarrassment, and with absolute confidence in the power of God, I will say to you, that if you will give your life to God, he is more than enough to satisfy you.

He will never disappoint. If you truly trust your life to him. Seek God. Secondly, seek God's righteousness. Why?

Because righteousness is about the right way to live. See, if I was to go out and buy a tumble dryer, or a microwave, or a washing machine, because I'm a domestic sort, you see, in the box would come the instructions.

And there's a guarantee that comes attached with those instructions. And it basically, the guarantee says, if you use this according to the manufacturer's instructions, and it breaks down within 18 months, then we will replace it free of charge.

[13 : 55] But there is an important caveat there. If I ignore them, you know, the manufacturer's instructions, and decide to wash my clothes in the microwave, and cook my dinner in the washing machine, and then it breaks down, well, it's going to go badly for me when I try to claim on it.

And say, well, you never used it for its proper intention. You took what I made, and you abused it. That's what we do with life sometimes.

Our creator made us. He gave us his instructions in the scripture about how we should live. And he says, if you live like this, you will live well.

But if you abuse the creator's instructions, and you take what he's made, and you destroy your body with sex, drugs, and rock and roll, and you destroy your body by not trusting in God, you live your own life without entrusting your life to God, then you can expect that when it breaks down, you'll be

in trouble.

He does not guarantee happiness for those who ignore his instructions. That's why we must seek God's righteousness. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your path.

[15 : 13] And then, lastly, seek to find. Seek to find. If we are really seeking first the kingdom of God, we really have to seek it.

But we seek with a purpose. The treasure hunt is God. And if we seek God, we will find God if we seek him with all our hearts.

So how do we seek God? Seek him in prayer. God wants to communicate to us, and we should pray continually in order to find him.

Seek him through his word, the Bible. He has written down his instructions. Let's read the Bible.

Let's seek to understand it. Let's apply its teaching to our lives. See, it's not just about saying, oh, isn't this a very interesting passage here in the Bible about God's peace.

It's actually saying, he has a promise from God of peace. God, give me that peace today. Seek him as you reflect and meditate on his ways.

[16 : 21] Think about it as you walk and as you live your life. How has God blessed you today? How has he been with you? And importantly, seek him in community.

That's why church is so important. Churches are not the kingdom of God. They are outposts of the kingdom of God. But they are places where those who are in the kingdom of God gather.

And I read this this week, which I thought was really excellent. Church is a moment in time when the kingdom of God draws near. When a meal, a story, a song, an apology, and even a failure makes us holy in the presence of Jesus and within us.

When do I see the kingdom of God come with power? I see it whenever I see a life transformed by Jesus. I see it when a broken person arrives here and says, I've made such a mess of my life and I don't know what to do.

I just can't control it anymore. I'm not able to manage. Is there anything that can be done? And we can say, yes, there is. Jesus is the answer.

[17 : 40] Instead of having him on the surface of your life, put him in the very center and allow the rest of life to flow around that center and if it does, you will find that you will manage your life in ways you never thought possible because you're no longer managing it alone.

You're managing it with Jesus at the very center. Do you know Jesus? Is Jesus your king? In the words of Johnny Cash, great singer Johnny Cash, I have tried drugs and a little of everything else and there is nothing in the world more soul satisfying than having the kingdom of God building inside of you and growing.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.