

SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM

Matthew 6:19-34

Key Verse: 6:33

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

In this passage Jesus teaches his disciples a most important principle which they must practice in order to follow him and learn from him. It is to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and to trust in God for their earthly needs. Let's accept this principle in our hearts. Then God will bless us spiritually and provide everything we need.

First, store up treasures in heaven (19-21).

Look at verse 19. “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.” What are treasures on earth? The most obvious treasure may be money. Most of us feel that if our bank account goes up that is good; if it goes down, that is bad. If it goes up a lot and keeps going up that is very good. But if it goes down to zero, and in some cases, below zero, that is very bad. Then, is Jesus telling us that our bank account should always be zero? No. Jesus is telling us not to put our hope in earthly treasures which are subject to decay and theft. Jesus' teaching is contrary to the social consensus. But Jesus' teaching is God's wisdom from above. Those who put their hope in earthly treasures will suffer loss sooner or later. A recent study was done of eight people in various parts of America who each won millions of dollars in a lottery. Within a few years, all of them had lost all their money. In addition, they had experienced personal tragedies. Some became terrible gamblers; some were betrayed by friends; one was the object of a murder conspiracy by greedy relatives. They were all miserable in the end. If we consider the “hell factor,” which will take effect if they don't repent their selfish use of money, their misery is only beginning. Jesus warns us for our good. Putting our hope in earthly treasure is foolish and ends in disaster.

Look at verse 20. “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal.” What is treasure in heaven? First of all, treasure in heaven is eternal life in the kingdom of God. This is the greatest gift of God and the treasure that we need more than anything. In Shakespeare's “King Richard III,” there is a moment when the king needs a horse more than anything else. So he cries out, “A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!” Likewise, there will come a time in each person's life when the only thing that matters is to have eternal life. Last week, twelve men in West Virginia were trapped in a mining accident. Community life came to a halt as friends and relatives gathered to offer support. Only one miner survived; eleven lost their lives. In that moment, the vanity of petty worldly pursuits was peeled away and all that mattered was to have eternal life. Only Jesus gives us eternal life. Eternal life is a gift from God for anyone who believes. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Jesus also promises us a glorious eternal dwelling. In John 14:2, Jesus told his disciples, “In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you.” The word “rooms” means “mansions.” The glory of these heavenly mansions is beyond imagination, and it is everlasting. There are no destructive elements in heaven. There are no thieves. Nothing ages, nothing decays. In heaven everything is glorious and everlasting.

When we have the assurance of eternal life in the kingdom of God, we find inner peace. We can be generous with our time and money. We can store up treasures in heaven. In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, we store up treasures in heaven by giving to the needy with a pure motive, and through prayer and fasting before God—not men. God remembers and rewards these acts of righteousness. In Matthew 25:35-40, King Jesus appears in his glory with all power and authority. He welcomes the righteous into his kingdom, saying, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” Then the righteous answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick and in prison and go to visit you?” King Jesus replies, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

It is interesting that the righteous did not remember what they did for the Lord and his people, but the Lord remembered. The righteous simply tried to serve Jesus and his people on a daily basis in whatever way they found to

do so. But every act was remembered by the Lord and would be blessed by the Lord. The other day I was remembering Deborah's and my wedding and the grace of God that we received through Dr. Samuel Lee and Mother Barry and many of God's servants. At that time, I had no money to buy a suit, shoes or even socks. I had nothing in my hand. Dr. Mark Yoon knew my situation. Without a word, he signed over to me an entire month of his salary as a wedding gift. In that way, I could fully prepare for my wedding. Dr. Yoon forgot about this. But I did not forget. Even more so, our Lord Jesus does not forget.

When we carry out one-to-one Bible study with college students and invest our time and resources to raise disciples, it seems to be a losing business. But everything we give to the Lord and his work is remembered by him and will be rewarded by him. The heroic missionary Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Mr. Elliot gave his life to Jesus as a martyr among the Waodani Indians. He received eternal life and a martyr's welcome into heaven. In addition, his act of love produced everlasting fruit of the salvation of many souls. Encouraged by his life-giving sacrifice, his wife and children, and even his grandchildren have continued his ministry.

We must think soberly about what we can take with us when we leave this world. There are at least three things, and money is not one of them. They include our spiritual character, our acts of faith and obedience, and our spiritual influence on others. A truly rich person is one who has the spiritual character of our Lord Jesus Christ, refined through much suffering. One woman missionary has struggled throughout her lifetime to deny herself, take up her cross and follow Jesus. Whenever she makes a decision, she totally sacrifices herself for the glory of God and the good of others. She has suffered much. But she has the beautiful image of Christ. She will take this to heaven with her. An act of obedience to God may go unnoticed on earth. But it is front page news in heaven. God remembers it and honors it forever. Missionary Daniel Kim has been a self-supporting student evangelist for the last 30 years, serving Northeastern University for most of that time. Countless students have heard the word of God through him and gone away, never to be seen by him again. Yet every word he has spoken for Christ is recorded in heaven and precious to God. Chicago UBF is rich because there are so many sacrificial missionaries who have given their lives and everything they have to Jesus. God has prepared a hall of glory for them in the kingdom of heaven. It will make this world look like a ghetto. They have been misunderstood, persecuted, and rejected in this world. But they will be welcomed into eternal glory with Christ and receive the crown of righteousness that never fades away.

Look at verse 21. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." When we store up treasure in heaven, we are happy even while living in this world. We can have joy and peace in the midst of sufferings. We can work hard overcoming hardships. Nothing can rob this joy from us because our treasure is safe in Jesus' hands. As we begin a new semester, let's make a quiet decision of faith to store up treasures in heaven. How? By preaching the gospel through one-to-one Bible study, and by serving the body of Christ.

Second, see the hope of heaven and serve God (22-24).

Look at verses 22-23. "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." Jesus uses the eye as a metaphor to express the spiritual focus of our hearts. In Ephesians 1:18, Paul writes, "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints...." When our hearts are enlightened with the glorious hope of heaven, we see God's glory in everything and can serve God joyfully. But when our hearts are full of dead hopes, we see only darkness and become spiritually dead. One young man had his hope in a shiny red sports car. He enjoyed it for a while, but when it was dented, he felt that his heart was dented. Soon he lost the joy of life and fell into depression. Many postmodern young people have degenerated from having dead hope to having no hope at all. They are never happy about anything, never excited about anything, never bubbling with idealism. In truth, they are already dead. We must have hope. The only living hope is Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 24. "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." "Money" is capitalized. It is translated from Mammon, the god of materialism. Having much money makes it possible to live in ease and pleasure, enjoying fine food and drink, and all kinds of entertainment. If one makes money for this purpose, he serves the god of materialism, Mammon. If we love Mammon, we despise God. If we love God, we despise Mammon. We must make a clear decision to serve God, and God alone.

Surely there were some people listening to Jesus who thought he was too extreme. They wanted to live for money and pleasure and still go to heaven. From time to time, in our Christian culture, celebrities of one kind or another pass away after enjoying money, fame and pleasure to the maximum degree. When this happens, there is usually a sympathetic news report which quotes a relative who says that the deceased is in a better place, suggesting heaven. Only God knows. But we must take Jesus' words seriously. The only way to gain eternal life in the kingdom of God is to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and King. To do this, we must repent of materialism. Look at verse 24 again. "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." May God open the eyes of our hearts to see our living hope in God. With this hope, let's serve God only.

Third, seek first his kingdom and righteousness (25-34).

When we want to serve God only, we must learn the spiritual secret of living in this world. We have material needs which are real and cannot be ignored. Jesus teaches us not to worry, but to seek God and to trust in God for everything. Our great enemy is worry. Worry can grow like a cancer to consume all of our time and energy. Worry makes us waste our precious lives doing nothing. Worry comes when we see our need without seeing our God. To help us overcome the habit of worrying, Jesus teaches us faith in God. Look at verse 25. "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?" We must remember that our lives came from God as a gift. The great Creator God who made us continues to care for us as our loving Father. God provides for all of his creatures. Jesus gave an example from nature.

Look at verse 26. "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" The birds of the air, among all of God's creatures, symbolize freedom, like the American eagle. Birds fly through the sky all over God's creation without worry. And God never fails to feed them. Since God feeds birds, creatures of instinct, how much more will he feed his children, who are made in his own image. By faith in God, we can be free from all worry, as free as the birds.

Worrying is only wasting energy. Look at verse 27. "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" We will live in this world as long as God allows us to. When God's time comes, we will leave this world and go to our eternal destiny. No matter how much we worry, we cannot add any time to our lives. How useless worry is! Let's not worry, but work hard for the glory of God. "Don't worry, serve God."

Look at verses 28-30. "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?" They say that women worry a lot about their clothes. One expert said that if a woman redirected the time and energy she spent worrying about her wardrobe, it would be sufficient for her to get a Ph.D. We don't need to worry about clothes. Our God who creates the beautiful lilies will clothe us beautifully according to his purpose.

Look at verses 31-32. "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 these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them." When we see ungodly people running after the things of the world, we can easily fall into worry, thinking we must imitate them. This is exactly what Jesus warns us to avoid. When we see the pagan world running, we must not run with them, like lemmings over the cliff. We must remember that our heavenly Father loves us. We must overcome the temptation to worry by trusting in the loving provision of our God.

God knows our needs. God can supply everything that we need to bear fruit and be happy in this world. Then what must we do? Look at verse 33. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." To seek first Jesus' kingdom and righteousness is to accept Jesus as our King and to obey him in daily life. A king is different than a president. A king is a sovereign ruler. His subjects do not vote for him; they belong to him, and they serve him wholeheartedly all the time. They strive to expand the territory and greatness of his kingdom. If necessary, they lay down their lives for him. In return the king cares for them and provides for them.

To seek Jesus' kingdom, we must listen to his word and obey it. To seek Jesus' righteousness, we must grow in faith and in the image of Christ through daily struggle. To engage in spiritual struggle is not easy at all. It is to write Bible testimonies with a repentant heart. It is to pray early in the morning instead of sleeping later. It is to go to the campus instead of going home after a day of hard work. It is to persistently be rejected in order to share the word of God with even one open-hearted student. It is to welcome God's sheep, even when they come at the most inconvenient time or with an urgent problem. It is to pray for the spread of house churches in American and Canadian campuses. It is to pray for sending out missionaries to the nations of the world. It is to go as a missionary if Jesus calls us to do so.

John and Maria Peace went to Ukraine as missionaries to advance Jesus' kingdom. They uprooted their family from a comfortable life in Chicago and began a new life in a new land with a new language. When they did so, God provided everything for them spiritually and materially. God has used them to bear fruit and they are happy. At present there are mission opportunities for Americans in Paraguay and Bolivia. The requirements are not difficult to meet, and everything necessary has been provided. All that is needed is a person who is willing to make the decision of faith to go there. God is ready to meet our needs. The question is, "What are we seeking first?" Is it family happiness? Is it career success? Is it our own comfort and convenience? Let's listen to Jesus' words with sincere hearts. Let's read Matthew 6:33 again. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

When we seek God's kingdom and righteousness first, God provides everything we need. When Shepherd Jim Rarick moved to Chicago from Milwaukee, he had only a car full of junk. When he arrived, he parked his car in the lot and then went fishing at UIC. He humbly received training from Dr. Samuel Lee as an orchestra conductor and a shepherd for many years. Then what happened to him? God has blessed his life in every way. His family, fellowship, music ministry, and career have all been abundantly blessed by God. God pours out his blessing on those who seek his kingdom and righteousness first.

Look at verse 34. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." When we seek God day by day, we need not worry about tomorrow. God holds all our tomorrows in his hand. All we need to do is to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. Amen.