

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.”

Last week we learned to practice righteousness regarding giving, prayer and fasting. Yet as we do so, we should not seek people’s recognition. If we do that, we will have no reward from God. Jesus exhorts us to live before God and seek God’s reward, not people’s. While that passage was about spiritual life, today’s passage is about how we deal with our material needs. We tend to dismiss this, thinking that it is not a spiritual issue. But Jesus teaches us to deal with material matters seriously. If we fail to solve our material problem, it can damage our spiritual life. One of the leading causes of divorce is struggles about money, according to the American Psychological Association.¹ For example, one man lost his job. Then his wife became very nervous and did whatever she could to earn money. This led to serious conflict. Learning how to deal with our material needs is very important. No one denies that we need money. Without money, we cannot survive. But when we seek money before God we fall into disaster. In this passage, Jesus teaches us to have a God-centered value system, life purpose and direction, so that we may live a fruitful and meaningful life.

First, store up treasures in heaven (19-24). In verses 19-21, the word “treasure” appears three times. Treasures are what we value most. Everyone treasures something. Here the issue is where we store up our treasure. We find a contrast in verses 19-20 between treasures on earth and treasures in heaven. Jesus said, **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...”** (19a). This does not mean that we should not save money in the bank, buy life insurance, or plan wisely for the future. It is a warning against seeking security through treasures on earth because enemies, like moths, vermin and thieves will destroy and steal our treasure (19b). Moths and vermin can ruin fine clothes and expensive houses. In our neighborhood, squirrels, rats and racoons eat holes in our houses. Sometimes sudden and heavy rains result in floods that ruin our basements. Thieves have broken into our church and taken musical instruments and equipment. Cyber thieves attack and endanger our bank accounts and infrastructure. Just this week, Pastor Steve and Amy Stasinis had their credit card information stolen. Terrorists kill innocent

¹ <http://www.kanecountydivorceattorneys.com/st-charles-lawyers/money-problems-divorce>

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people so often, even yesterday in London. Eventually, everything on earth will perish, and we ourselves will die. There is no true security on earth.

Then Jesus said, **“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal”** (20). Treasures in heaven are always safe and never perish, spoil or fade away. In heaven, there is no death, nor any of its elements, such as sorrow, disease, pain, grief, or depression. It is because Jesus conquered the power of death through his resurrection. He gives us eternal life. Our treasures in heaven last forever. Storing up treasures in heaven is indeed a wise and worthwhile endeavor. This is really encouraging!

Even though this is so encouraging, we are still very interested in storing up treasures on earth. Why? Treasures on earth seem very real and tangible, while treasures in heaven sound surreal and vague. But this is not so. We may think that treasure in heaven is only what will be given in the future: his consummated kingdom, a resurrection body, and a mansion in heaven. Surely, God will give these amazing blessings in the future. At the same time, God’s reward is something we can experience now. For example, when we ask, God provides what we need. God blesses our families by protecting us, and helping us to be fruitful. Also, God gives us ability to produce wealth so that we may be able to do good works (Dt 8:18). Furthermore, God gives us peace deep within our hearts that no one can take away. With God’s peace, we can have the inner freedom to love and serve others. With God’s peace, we can handle the trials of life with joy. And God gives us heavenly wisdom when we ask him. His wisdom enables us to solve difficult problems, reveal his glory and be a blessing to others.

Then, what does it mean to store up treasures in heaven? It means that our effort and labor is focused on heaven rather than earth. In other words, our direction and purpose of life is God-centered and heavenly, not self-centered and earthly. It is a great contrast. People store up treasures on earth to enjoy their lives in this world. However, people store up treasure in heaven when they live for Jesus and his kingdom. Depending on what we treasure, our value system and lifestyle will be quite different. Where our treasure is, we will invest our time and money and our very lives. If we invest our lives in something that disappears in the end, our labor and lives themselves are in vain. But if we invest everything we have for what is eternal, we will never regret it. Rather, we will be filled with a deep sense of satisfaction and thanksgiving. This remains forever. In 2 Corinthians 9:9, Paul declares, **“They**

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have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.” George Sweeting, former president of Moody Bible Institute, said “At the end of our lives, the important question is not, ‘How much money did you make?’ but ‘How much did you give for Christ and his kingdom?’” Storing up our treasures in heaven is not a losing business. It is the most secure and profitable investment.

In verse 21, Jesus explains the fundamental reason why we should store up treasures in heaven: **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** If money is our treasure, whether we have it or not, we will think about it and worry about it constantly. Those who have money will agonize day and night over how to invest it. Those who do not have money think about how to make money all the time. The point is that our treasure and our heart are closely connected. What we treasure has a tremendous impact on how we live. Money cannot be a lasting treasure and hope. Proverbs 23:4-5 say, **“Do not wear yourselves out to get rich; do not trust your own cleverness. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.”** This is why we need to have a clear value system and life direction in Christ and his kingdom. Apostle Paul exhorted Timothy: **“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way, they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life”** (1Ti 6:17-19). We store up treasure in heaven when we use material resources compassionately to meet others’ needs for the sake of God’s kingdom. What do you really treasure in your deep heart? This will determine our value system, life direction and lifestyle.

In verses 22 and 23, Jesus uses an analogy to explain how one’s heart value system affects life direction: **“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”** The eye is a small part of the body, but it is the only place where light comes in so that we can see the world around us and discern what is good or bad. Healthy eyes see God and money in proper perspective. They enlighten us to know what is valuable and how to use money. This helps us to be generous and fruitful.

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On the other hand, if our eyes are unhealthy, we do not know right from wrong. We live in darkness and use money selfishly. This darkness overpowers us until it controls everything we think and do. We become slaves of greed and instruments of the devil. Such people are like the rich fool in Jesus' parable in Luke's gospel. He accumulated treasures on earth. Then he said to himself, **"You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."** But God said to him, **"You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"** This is how it will be for those who store up things for themselves but are not rich toward God (Lk 12:16-21). Let's take Jesus' warning to heart. Let's examine objectively what our decisions and actions reveal about us. Are we generous toward God and others, or stingy?

Whether we store up treasure in heaven or on earth ultimately depends on what master we serve. Some people think, "I can serve both God and money. I will serve money from 9-5 on weekdays, and God in the evenings and on weekends." They do not understand that both masters require full devotion. Jesus explains, **"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money"** (24). No one can serve both God and money. We must choose to serve one or the other. Accordingly, we will be servants of God or slaves of money. When we become servants of God, we can live for the glory of God at work, at home, and whatever we do. When we serve God wholeheartedly, he gives us the wisdom to manage money. Money itself is not bad. The Bible does not teach us to despise money, but to use money wisely for the glory of God. Many people study hard to learn how to make money. But not many people study hard to learn how to use money. Let's pray that we may serve God, be wise managers, and store up treasures in heaven.

Second, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness (25-34). After hearing Jesus' words, the disciples began to worry, "If I serve God wholeheartedly, how will I survive in this world?" When worries come into our hearts, we lose joy and peace. We become very nervous and anxious. In verse 25 Jesus said, **"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 than food, and the body more than clothes?"** Jesus' main point is that life is more important than food, and the body than clothes. Life

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and the body are the essence of our being, which comes from God. Human beings are valuable because we are made in God's image to have fellowship with him. This should be our main concern. But to many people, their main concern is what to eat and drink and wear. They work hard and earn a lot of money to eat and drink well, and to wear fine clothes. Then they become sick and spend all their money on hospital bills. Finally, they die in a luxurious house with a fancy sports car in the driveway. That is not life. Life is more than that.

Jesus gave us reasons why we should not worry. In verse 26, Jesus said, **“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 word “look,” means more than just glancing at. It means to look at intently, think about and consider. Jesus wants us to learn a lesson from the birds. About ten years ago, two scientists attempted to count the number of birds in the world. They estimated between 200 and 400 billion individual birds.² None of these birds know how to raise or store up crops. Of course, they work hard to find their food. As the saying goes, “The early bird gets the worm.” But the amazing truth is that God feeds them every day, valuing the lives of birds. Jesus calls God “your heavenly Father.” Our Father God, values people much more than birds. Surely, he will feed us. Still, we should work hard. Yet we should not worry, but trust God.

Verse 27 teaches us that it is useless to worry. Worry does not add a single hour to our life; rather, it can reduce our lifespan. Around 2008, a new mental disease was identified called “money anxiety disorder.” It describes the condition of constant worry and unease about money. It is so strong that it triggers a “fight or flight” response. It takes hold of a person's mind so fully that they imagine, in a matter of seconds, possibly losing their job, then losing it, then not being able to pay the mortgage, then being homeless, followed by almost certain death.³ When worry occupies our hearts we cannot concentrate on study, work, or the conversation we are having with someone. When we trust God, we are free from worry. Then we can work hard, be productive and relate to others in a healthy way.

Next Jesus talks about clothes in verses 28-30. He said, **“See how the flowers of the field grow.”** “See” means “to think about for the purpose of

² <http://www.amnh.org/ology/features/askascientist/question16.php>

³ <https://www.dailyworth.com/posts/3302-how-to-deal-with-money-anxiety-disorder-stoffer>

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ultimate understanding; to consider, to observe.” It means to consider carefully until we obtain wisdom from the flowers. Jesus specifically mentions uncultivated wildflowers, such as lilies. When we see lilies, their texture, shape, design, and colors are amazing. Solomon was the most well-dressed man in Israel’s history. In 2017, the music artist Drake was rated best dressed. But lilies are much more splendid than Solomon or Drake. Worries about what to eat, drink, and wear drive pagans to run after these things (31-32a). But we should remember that God is our Father. He loves us, takes care of us, and knows our needs before we ask (32b). So, we don’t need to worry. Why do people worry? Jesus said, **“You of little faith”** (30b). We worry when we have little faith. If we are full of worry, we should repent our lack of faith. Worries attack anyone at any time. Worries do not discriminate based on wealth, race, or social status. Worries are like germs. When germs attack, we become sick. Likewise, worries make us sick in spirit. Whenever worries attack us, we need to hear Jesus’ rebuke, **“You of little faith,”** repent of our lack of faith, and trust God, remembering that our heavenly Father knows our needs.

In verse 33, Jesus teaches us what we should do instead of worrying: **“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”** “Seek” means to have a strong desire for and to keep pursuing as our life purpose. His “kingdom and righteousness” are almost synonymous and refer to his sovereign rule over us and having a right relationship with him. “First” means that it is to be our consuming priority. It is not simply first on a list of many things, but a priority in all things. Life is very hectic and we need to do many things. But in all that we do, we are to seek God’s reign over us, his righteousness within us, and to expand his reign as of first importance. This is the purpose and direction of our lives. Our first prayer topic should be **“...your kingdom come...”** (Mt 6:10a).

When we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, Jesus’ promise is, **“...and all these things will be given to you as well.”** This means that everything we need will be provided by God. Jesus is faithful. He never disappoints those who seek his kingdom and his righteousness. This is not something we can understand just by thinking about it. It can only be understood by experience. Recently Dr. Mark Yang and I visited Riga, Latvia and met M. Esther Kim. About two years ago, her husband Caleb passed away at the age of 46. She was faced many difficulties, including visa and job problems. It seemed that her only choice was to return to Korea. But she firmly decided to remain in her mission field, seeking first God’s kingdom

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and his righteousness. When she did so, her visa problem was miraculously solved; she was granted a green card. Then the way was miraculously opened to establish the King Sejong language institute within Riga Technical University. This became her means of self-support, as well as the way to engage with college students. About 80 Latvian students are studying the Korean language with her, while a fellow missionary, Timothy Kang, manages the institute. They invited all of their students to the 2017 Easter Bible Conference. Nine came. This is what God does for those who seek him.

Jesus concluded: **“Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”** People tend to worry about the future. They worry about what will happen tomorrow, next year, even ten years from now. Worry produces all kinds of negative imaginations which paralyze us with fear. But we don’t know what will happen tomorrow. Jesus says, **“tomorrow will worry about itself.”** We should not import tomorrow’s worries into today’s experience. Corrie Ten Boom, a Christian holocaust survivor, said, “Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength.” God is our loving heavenly Father, who provides our needs when we seek him first. Let’s store up treasure in heaven. Let’s seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.