

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.”

These days our national debt is very serious. It has reached 14 2½ trillion dollars. That means that each person in the United States owes more than \$46,000, even my four-year old son Joshua. This will have a great impact on our lives. All kinds of taxes will increase, at a time when many are still trying to recover from the mortgage crisis and the disappearance of their retirement funds. This causes people to worry about their future security. Many are full of stress, and this burdens family relationships to the breaking point. Many people are crazy to get money; some even become criminals. People are seeking security in something.

Although we Christians do not belong to this world, we are in the world. We are vulnerable to nagging anxiety about our lives and the lives of our children. This robs our spiritual power, making us sorrowful and ineffective. What is the real problem? What is the solution? Today Jesus deals with the security problem. People try to solve it by storing up treasures on earth, and they worry a lot about it. However, Jesus teaches us to store up treasures in heaven. Most importantly, Jesus urges us to seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness. Then we can find true security.

I. Store up treasures in heaven (19-24)

In this part, Jesus teaches us how to deal with material things. Jesus uses two allegories, making a progressive development from treasures to the eye, or the heart. Jesus concludes that each person must make a right decision about which master they will serve: God or money.

The first allegory teaches us to store up treasures in heaven, not on earth. Look at verse 19. **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.”** People have a great concern about their future. They want future security and happiness. For this purpose, they save their money in banks, invest in stocks and real estate, buy various kinds of insurance, and so on. People think that treasures stored up in this way will be secure. But actually, they are not. Everything in the world is in the process of being corrupted and fading away. Moths and vermin--such as rats, squirrels, mice, cockroaches and the like--make holes in people’s expensive

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clothes and ruin houses. Bank interest has been drastically reduced. The stock market has declined. Real estate in our city has lost half its value. The U.S. government may not be able to pay Social Security benefits next month. In addition there are thieves, even identity thieves. Sometimes we are cheated by sneaky people or robbed. Eventually we will lose everything because of death. Thieves and robbers and death will come suddenly and unexpectedly. So Proverbs 23:4-5 warns us: **“Do not wear yourself 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.”** In a nutshell, it is not safe to store up treasures on earth. There is no true security on earth.

Look at verse 20. **“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”** Jesus urges us to store up treasures in heaven because they will be safe. They will never perish, spoil or fade away (1 Pe 1:4). There is no thief to take them. There is no death, and no sorrow, mourning or pain (Rev 21:4). In heaven there is true and eternal security.

However, many people do not store up treasures in heaven. Why? Treasures in heaven seem unreal and very distant, while money is very tangible. If we have money in the bank, we can withdraw it any time and use it. In truth, we can also access heavenly treasure, by prayer. God has hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Christ (Col 2:3). Christ is always available, even when the bank is closed. Yet most people ignore treasures in heaven. It is because they trust money more than God.

What does it mean to store up treasure in heaven? Here “treasures” are not just money, but include our children, education, social position, or anything which we love and value. We should not use our treasures for our selfish purpose and glory. We should use them for God’s kingdom and his glory. Our purpose of life, hope, and value system are related. If our purpose and hope are on the earth, we will store up treasures in this world. If our purpose and hope are in God, we will store up treasures in heaven. In the book of Acts there is a man named Cornelius. He was a Roman centurion. Usually Roman centurions abused their privileges and exploited people in the colonies. But Cornelius and all his family were devout and God-fearing. He gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. In this way he stored up treasure in heaven. Then God blessed his life and saved him and his family through the gospel (Ac 10:44). His name has become known down through the generations, and around the world.

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Life is an investment. It is important to know where we invest our time, money, youth, energy, and all our treasures. If we invest our treasures in something that disappears, in the end we have labored in vain. However, if we invest our lives in eternity, we find absolute meaning and we will be joyful and thankful. God rewards us. George Sweeting, a former chancellor of Moody Bible Institute, said, “At the end of your life, the important question to ask is not ‘How much did you make,’ but ‘How much did you give, especially to God’s ministry and for his purpose.’” The most important thing is not gaining riches, but giving them for God’s kingdom.

Look at verse 21. **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** This verse explains the basic reason why we should store up treasure in heaven. Treasure and heart cannot be separated. If our treasure is on earth, then our heart will be there also. When I was young, I drove around in a bright red sports car. It was my treasure. My heart was invested in it. When the car was scratched, I felt my heart was scratched. When I had a car accident, I felt my heart was damaged badly. Where our treasure is, there our heart will be - either on earth or in heaven. When our heart is on earth, we gradually lose interest in spiritual things; serving God becomes a burden, and our hearts drift far from God. In order to help us avoid this, St. Paul gave clear direction how to use money. He said in 1 Timothy 6:17-19: **“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.”**

The second allegory teaches us the importance of having healthy eyes, that is, a healthy heart in making decisions. Look at verse 22. **“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light.”** In Jewish literature, the eye could symbolize the heart. As the eye is the lamp of the body, so the heart is a lamp of the soul that reveals one's inner life. A healthy eye suggests loyal devotion to God, while an unhealthy eye connotes moral corruption (23). Storing up treasures is related to our heart. If we have a healthy heart we can have a right decision to store up treasures in heaven, and vice-versa. Our heart is related to our value system. If we have a sound value system, we have spiritual discernment and can make right moral judgments. A good example is Moses. When Moses reached manhood, he had to decide between two alternatives: to live as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, or to participate in the suffering of his people.

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Hebrews 11:25-26 says, **“He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.”** I earnestly pray that our young people may make right decisions, like Moses.

Look at verse 24. **“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.”** Many people know it is good to store up treasures in heaven. But practically, storing up treasures on earth cannot be ignored. So they try to pursue both of them. If we could, it would be good and seems to be wise. Many people think that if they have a lot of money, they can serve God and others more effectively. So they pursue money first, planning to use it to serve God later. Why does this not work? Money refers to Mammon, the god of materialism. Mammon is an idol that requires full devotion. At the same time, the one true God requires full devotion. So no one can serve both. We must decide which one we are going to serve. These days many young people study hard in order to get a good job. We need to study hard. However, that cannot be our idol which requires full devotion. Money itself is not bad. But the problem is that money has a kind of magic power; after getting money, people change. We must be clear about this: God is our Master, not money. We are stewards of money for God's glory and purpose. We should use money to serve God.

II. Do not worry (25-34)

Now Jesus talks about the worries which believers can easily have. Verse 25 begins, **“Therefore I tell you, do not worry....”** The connecting word tells us that when we make a right decision in regards to who we serve, we have no reason to worry. Jesus knew the mind of the disciples. They decided to store up treasures in heaven, and serve God only. They left everything to follow Jesus. However, when they did so, clouds of worries about practical needs descended upon them, such as: “If I serve God, who will take care of me?” Or “What will happen when I become old if I have only treasures in heaven?” Or “I am okay, but how about my wife and my children?” When such worries came into their hearts, they would lose joy and peace. Instead of doing something for Jesus, they would just worry. So Jesus said to them in 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 than food, and the body more than clothes?”** Life and the body are a matter of being, that is, life. Food and clothes are possessions. Being, or life, is more valuable than possessions. Jesus said, **“What good is it for a man to gain the**

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whole world yet forfeit his soul?” (Mk 8:35) But most people value possessions more than being. There is an interesting story. A man in New York was walking on the street. He was assaulted by a robber who said, “Your money or your life!” He answered, “Take my life because I need money for my future.” People worry about what to eat, what to drink, and what to wear, even when they have enough of all these things.

In order to teach us not to worry, Jesus gave an example in 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?”** Many people misunderstand this verse. They think that if God feeds them, they do not need to work. But when we look at the birds of the air, they are diligent and work hard to get food. There is a saying, “The early bird gets the worm.” So we have to work hard. But we don’t need to worry. Work hard, but don’t worry.

In verse 27 Jesus told us that it is useless to worry. He asked, **“Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”** The footnote says, **“...or a single cubit to your height.”** If we could add to our lifespan by worrying, we should worry day and night. If we could grow even one inch by worrying, then it may be valuable. But if we worry, our lifespan is actually reduced and we can shrivel up some and shrink. We also develop all kinds of health problems, such as stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, and heart disease. We can also lose our hair. Worry divides our hearts and robs our concentration. So if we worry, we will more likely fail in our studies or careers. On the other hand, if we live by faith, we will become peaceful, digest our food well, sleep well, and surely the victory is ours!

In verses 28-29 Jesus talks about clothes: **“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers 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.”** The old NIV translates “flowers” as “lilies.” Lilies are wildflowers. When we look at the lilies - their design, shape, color, and scent - they are more splendid than Solomon on his best day. God’s creation is perfect and wonderful. God clothes even the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire. Then why would he not clothe his own children? God is our Father who loves us and takes care of us. He knows our needs and provides for us. So Jesus said to his disciples, **“...you of little faith”** (30). **This verse tells us that the fundamental reason of worrying is a lack of faith. Lack of faith means to not trust God fully.**

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We don't need to worry, saying, **“What shall we eat?”** or **“What shall we drink?”** or **“What shall we wear?”** Pagans run after all these things. It is because they do not trust God. When we do not trust God, worry comes very naturally, even though we know that it is useless. People worry about their health, their employment, marriage, children's education, houses, retirement plan, and even their burial site. They manufacture worries; their head is a factory of worries. They even imagine things to worry about. Sometimes we decide that from now on we will not worry about these things anymore. Then we begin to worry about whether we can keep our decision or not. How can we overcome worry? We need to hear Jesus' rebuking, “You of little faith.” Verses 8 and 32 repeat the same thought: our Father knows what we need. When children trust their parents, they do not worry. Likewise, when we trust our heavenly Father, we do not need to worry at all, about anything.

Instead of worrying, what should 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 his kingdom is to serve God with an undivided heart. God's kingdom and his righteousness means God's reign in the world and in our hearts. Seeking God's kingdom and righteousness should be our purpose and life direction. The word “first” does not mean “order,” but “priority.” Whatever we do, whether eat or drink, study, work, marry, or have children, we should do it for God and his kingdom. The real meaning of seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness is to trust God fully and let him reign over our lives. In other words, we should find true security in God. God himself is our shield and our reward (Gen 15:1). If we please God, God provides everything. When Solomon sought first wisdom and a discerning heart to serve his people, God gave him wealth and glory as well (1 Ki 3:5-13). When we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, all these things will be given to us as well - this is God's promise. God never disappoints anyone who lives by faith and holds this promise. God is able to give us abundantly more than we can ask or imagine (Eph 3:20).

The times we live in sometimes remind me of the Great Depression in our history. The movie, “You Can't Take It With You,” was made during that time, in 1938. It gave a message which also speaks to us today. It contrasts a ruthless banker and a neighborhood grandfather in New York City. The banker was rich, hardworking, diligent, and well connected to many influential people. But he had no real friends. He had no room in his heart for people, but only for money. He boasted about his achievement and despised ordinary people. On the contrary, the grandfather was compassionate and kind. He opened his home to neighbors. He never worried about his life. He was always positive, happy and joyful because he

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trusted in God. He served many kinds of needy people. In the course of the movie, the grandfather rebukes the banker for loving money and warns him that it would not give him true security. As the movie plays out, the banker remembers these words and eventually walks away from his selfish lifestyle. This story helped people realize in 1938 that our problem was lack of faith in God.

In the same way, we need to realize that our national root problem is lack of faith in God. Our nation was founded by Puritans who sought God's kingdom and righteousness first. They came here with nothing in their hands, but sought freedom to worship and serve God. For this, they were willing to suffer much. God blessed their faith and made America the richest nation in history. Here we find the secret to solving our national debt. As our coins and currency say, "In God we trust," we should trust in God with all our hearts, seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness. Then God will bless us as he promises. It is encouraging that Governor Perry of Texas has called for a national day of prayer and fasting on August 6th, acknowledging that our problem is basically unfaithfulness to God and urging us to seek God. Let me share just one more story. One missionary had to close his business and faced many debts. But he and his wife decided to seek God's kingdom first by studying the word of God diligently. They wrote Bible testimonies every week with all their hearts and minds - sometimes staying up all night. Two years later, their debts were gone, though they don't fully know how.

When we trust God we don't have to worry about our daily needs, and we don't have to worry about the future. Look at verse 34. **"Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."** People tend to worry the future rather than being concerned about today. They worry what will happen tomorrow, next year, in ten years, or even in twenty years. Worry produces all kinds of negative imaginations. Then people become fearful. Yet we do not know what will happen tomorrow. We really don't know what will happen one hour from now. So Jesus tells us to let tomorrow worry about tomorrow, and be faithful to God today. Thomas a' Kempis said that we should do our best today, as if today is our last day of life. When we entrust our lives and future in God's hands and do our best today - seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness - God will surely bless us, and our nation.