

SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

Matthew 6:1-34

Key Verse: 6:33, **“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”**

As Americans, we don't like kings. We are a democracy. But history proves that a nation with a just and benevolent king, a shepherd king like King David, is blessed. In the area of government and politics, we long for leaders, kings or presidents, who are people of integrity, men and women who fear God, who are servant leaders and shepherd rulers. Our true King is God. Jesus tells each of us to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness. Today we want to think about Matthew 6 and especially, 6:33, **“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”** We want to think about God's Kingdom and his righteousness and about **“all these things.”**

Matthew's gospel begins with the genealogy of the King, Jesus the Messiah. He is the descendant of King David. After John's arrest, Jesus moved to Capernaum and began his Galilean ministry. His first message was about the kingdom: **“Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”** He went throughout Galilee teaching in the synagogues the good news of the kingdom.

Crowds came in greater and greater numbers. He knew that it was time to focus on teaching his disciples. He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him and he began to teach them. Matthew, chapters 5-7 is a kind of snapshot of his teaching ministry. It is called “The Sermon on the Mount.” He began the Sermon on the Mount with the “Beatitudes”-- “Be Attitudes”. He teaches us the attitude we should have as his disciples. In these first few verses, “Blessed” is repeated 9 times. The first one is “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Kingdom seekers must know their spiritual need. Jesus' disciples seek God's kingdom and long for his righteousness. Their hearts are open to receive God's grace.

1. Seek first his kingdom

Chapter 6:33 says, **“Seek first his kingdom...”** We seek many things. We seek the things that we think will make us happy. We seek love. We seek success. We seek honor and praise. We want to achieve something. Young men should be ambitious. We want friends. These are good things. Jesus does not say that we should not seek them. He does not tell us not to seek good things. He does tell us to seek God's kingdom and his righteousness first. – To put God first.

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In the Old Testament we meet a teenager named Daniel. When the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, they took some of the bright and able young people to Babylon to educate and train them for service in the palace of the king. Among them were Daniel and his three friends. It was a great opportunity for these young men. They could receive the best education in the world, for Babylon was the world super power. And even though they were aliens, they had a bright future in the Babylonian government. Daniel and his friends put God's kingdom first—before the kingdom of Babylon. They decided not to defile themselves by eating the rich royal food, prepared just for them. God blessed them with good health and protected them from the king's wrath. When the king tested them, he found that in every matter of wisdom and understanding they were ten times better than all the magicians and wise men in the whole kingdom. They rose to high positions in the Babylonian government. They continued to seek God's kingdom first. Daniel ignored the king's order that made praying to God a criminal offense. He was arrested and thrown into a den of lions. God closed the lions' mouths and protected him. Daniel served under 4 kings. But he put God's kingdom first. His friends refused to bow to an idol the king had made and they were thrown into a fiery furnace. Again, God protected them. He walked with them in the fire. They learned that God gives all necessary things to those who seek his kingdom and his righteous first.

In the New Testament we meet an unlikely kingdom seeker. Jesus was on his way from Judea to Galilee. He went out of his way to meet a Samaritan woman. This woman sought love from many husbands. She met Jesus and realized that her real thirst was for God - his kingdom and his righteousness. She came to know the Messiah, the true king for whom she had been waiting. She drank the living water of eternal life. (Jn 17:3)

Kingdom seekers are those who honor God and put him first. Eric Liddell was Scotland's and England's fastest 100-meter sprinter. He was on the British Olympic team, competing in the 1924 Paris Olympics. His race was the 100-meter race. He was his country's hope of bringing home the gold. After arriving in Paris, he learned that the qualifying trials for the 100-meter race were on Sunday. Eric was raised in China, son of missionary parents. He knew Jesus. When he left China and came to Scotland for college, Eric had made a decision to put God first, to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness. He believed that to keep the Sabbath Day holy was honoring to God. So he did not compete on Sunday. When he announced to his country that he could not run the 100-meter, everyone was very upset. They called him a traitor to his country. The Prince of Wales, the future king

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of England, tried to persuade him to change his mind but he held to his decision. God helped him. A teammate offered to give him his slot on the 400-meter race. So on a hot Friday afternoon, Eric, who had never trained for such distance running, ran the 400-meter race. No one expected him to win because two others running in that race had set world record time. But Eric did his best. And he came home with the gold. He honored God. And God honored him. At the height of his Olympic career he made another decision to put God's kingdom first. He decided to give up his Olympic career and go to China as a missionary.

Jesus himself sought the kingdom first. In the Lord's Prayer, He prayed, **"Hallowed be your name. Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."**

God's kingdom is where God is ruling. Once the Pharisees asked Jesus, **"When will God's kingdom come?"** Jesus replied, **"The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed. Nor will people say here it is or there it is, because the kingdom of God is in your midst (within you)."** (Lk 17:20) God's kingdom comes in a person's heart when one opens his heart and welcomes Jesus to come in. Jesus does not come in as a guest. He is the Lord, the King. When Jesus comes in to dwell, God's kingdom comes. When we share the gospel with the people of the world, we are extending the kingdom.

But that's not all; we are waiting for King Jesus, the Son of Man, who will come again in power and in great glory. This is the hope and vision of Kingdom members. Only God the Father knows when that day will be. He will bring to an end the world as we know it and usher in a new heaven and a new earth. He will bring with him hosts of angels and the elect from the four winds. We will rise to meet him in the air. He will come and bring the new heaven and the new earth. His will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. He will reign forever and ever. (Mt 24; 1Th 4, 5; Rev 21) Come quickly Lord Jesus!

2. Seek his righteousness

Righteousness is a right relationship with God. Chapter 5 teaches us that Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. He fulfills the Law and he fills it with meaning. The Law is not just about our actions. It is about purity of heart. It is about love. The chapter ends with: **"love your enemies."** And, **"Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."** No one can come up to God's standard; we are sinners who need God's forgiveness. As forgiven sinners, we

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need his continual help. The Law reveals God's righteousness. It exposes our sins and points us to Jesus.

How can we seek God's righteousness? The Jews pursued the Law as the way of righteousness and they failed. (Ro 9:30) We can't erase our past sins. When we try to be righteous by keeping the Law or by doing good deeds, we find that we can't be good enough. We become self-righteous and judgmental. There is a difference between God's righteousness and self-righteousness. I have no righteousness in myself. To seek God's righteousness is to seek a right relationship with God.

We must seek God's righteousness in God's way - through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Righteousness is by faith, not by works. It is a gift of God's grace. (Ro 9:30-33) We receive God's grace by faith. (Ro 1:17) **“For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”** What is the gospel? The gospel is the good news that **“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”** When we repent and accept this gospel, our sins are forgiven. Christ clothes us with his righteousness. The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. By grace we have a right relationship with God, a vine and branch relationship with Jesus. He continues to work in us through his indwelling Holy Spirit—also a gift of his grace. The King has come to rule our hearts and lives.

Abraham sought God's righteousness—a right relationship with God. He could not be righteous in his own strength. By faith he obeyed God's word and went to Canaan. But he could not overcome fear. Out of fear he went to Egypt. He feared for his life and lied about his wife. He believed God would give him a son, but he became impatient and got a son by sleeping with his concubine. He offered a tithe to God, but this did not count as righteousness. He couldn't make himself righteous. He could not have deep, life-giving trust relationship with God. However, when he believed God's promises, his faith was credited to him as righteousness. Ro 4 says that even though Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children, Abraham believed in God who raises the dead. Ro4:18: **“He was fully persuaded that God could do what he promised. By faith he had a son and so became the father of many nations. This is why (his faith) “was credited to him as righteousness.”**²³ The words **“it was credited to him”** were written not for him alone,²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in God, who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.” He died for our sins and was raised to life so that we might be forgiven and have eternal life

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with God. We seek a right relationship with God by faith in Jesus. We are seekers of his righteousness.

3. All these things

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” What does Jesus mean by **“all these things?”** Surely, he is not promising just to solve our physical problems or meet our material needs. More than this, he knows the things that capture our minds and hearts and make us anxious. At least 8 times in this short passage (25-34) Jesus tells us not to worry. When we put our trust in God and seek his kingdom first, he gives us the things we really need. What we need most is peace-- “shalom”, a sense of peace and well-being. We need God’s peace. Jesus rebukes us worriers for our lack of faith. We can put our trust in God because we know he loves us. (Ro 8 says, **“...If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

According to Jesus, we worry about our lives because our faith is too small (30). We run after the things that pagans (who are unbelievers) run after. God who loves us gives us everything we really need. But we must trust him and never doubt his love—even in the worst of times. We can listen to the voice of King Jesus each time, accept his love and grace, give our anxieties to him and obey our king.

4. A committed life—where is your heart? (18-24)

Jesus wants our hearts. He wants a committed heart and life. Verse 19 says, **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also.”**

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In our world today, materialism is crouching at the door, ready to pounce on anyone whose heart is undecided. The uncommitted heart is vulnerable. Jesus tells us plainly that we cannot serve two masters. We must make a commitment to God by faith, or by default and calculations, we make a commitment to money and the world. Where is your heart? Where is my heart?

In verses 22-23, Jesus suddenly begins to talk about the healthy and unhealthy eyes. In seeking anything, the eyes are important. Jesus says, the eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. The TNIV footnote says that a healthy eye implies generosity, and an unhealthy eye implies stinginess. If one's heart is stingy, selfishly attached to the world, he is full of darkness. He cannot see to make a right decision to commit his heart to God and store his treasure in heaven. If his eye is healthy and full of light, he can catch a vision of God's kingdom and put his treasure there. Our hearts are where our treasure is.

As we seek his kingdom we soon find that the King wants our hearts. Verse 24 says, **“You cannot 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.”** The kingdom life is a life committed to God. There is no compromise.

In Genesis the lives of Abraham and Lot are a classic example. Lot was Abraham's nephew. He traveled with his godly uncle to Canaan, then to Egypt and back to Canaan. He became wealthy by God's grace and by Abraham's love and generosity. The time came to make a decision. Lot knew that the people of Sodom were ungodly people, but he thought he could handle it. He wanted the best of both worlds. He wanted to live a righteous life, but his heart was drawn to the wealthy cities of the Jordan valley. He left his uncle Abraham. He chose to pitch his tent toward Sodom. He was caught by his worldly desires. Even though his life was in danger, he couldn't leave the bright lights of Sodom. By God's grace and Abraham's prayer he escaped the destruction of Sodom, but he wound up living in a cave with his two daughters and the children of incest. Abraham continued his pilgrimage toward the city with foundations whose builder and maker is God. (Heb 11) He sought God's kingdom.

We seek God's kingdom and his righteousness one day at a time. Vs 34 says that we don't need to worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough troubles of its own. When we are seeking to put his kingdom

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first, God will open and close doors. We need to be obedient and thankful. May God help me and each of us to live by faith from first to last as we seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness.