

“Seek First” (Matthew 6:24–34)(7.19.20)

Matthew 6:24–34 (NIV84)

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.

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? 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? ²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.

²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ 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? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: **“Seek First”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

What brought you here this morning?

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism makes this piercing observation:

“Does not every man see, that he cannot *comfortably* serve both? That to trim between God and the world is the sure way to be disappointed in both, and to have no rest either in one or the other? How uncomfortable a condition must he be in, who, having the fear but not the love of God,—who, serving him, but not with all his heart,—has only the toils and not the joys of religion? He has religion enough to make him miserable, but not enough to make him happy: His religion will not let him enjoy the world, and the world will not let him enjoy God. So that, by halting between both, he loses both; and has no peace either in God or the world.”^[1]

We have before us the very words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Our Lord taught us how to live and showed us how to live. In His coming, he inaugurated the kingdom of God and proclaimed that kingdom. True Kingdom living is the intentional prioritizing the things of God over the things of the world. Living in our Father’s kingdom, is living righteously. While this is a personal issue, it is also a cosmic issue as history marches towards the completion of the kingdom of God in Christ’s second coming.

So, what brought you here this morning? Do you seek first God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness?

BODY:

For hundreds of years, one of the most read Christian books is John Bunyan’s allegory *Pilgrim’s Progress*. The characters are given somewhat obvious names that describe them. The central character is a man named Christian. He is a pilgrim of God on a journey of faith from the city of Destruction to the Celestial City.

Evangelist said, “Do you see that bright light?” **[Christian]** said, “I think so. Yes, I do.”

Then **Evangelist** said, “Keep that light in sight, and go directly to it. Then you will find the gate, and when you are there, knock and you will be told what to do next.”

^[1] Wesley, J. (1999). [*Sermons, on several occasions*](#). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

So I saw in my dream that [**Christian**] began to run, but he had not gone far before his wife and children saw him running and began to call to him to return. The man put his fingers in his ears and ran on, crying, "Life! Life! Eternal life!" He did not look back, but fled toward the middle of the plain. His neighbors, hearing his family, also came out to see him. As he ran, some mocked, some threatened, and some cried out to him to return; among those were two who resolved to bring him back by force. One was named **Obstinate** and the other **Pliable**. By the time they started chasing him, [Christian] was a good ways ahead of them, but they were determined to pursue him, and shortly they overtook him. [Christian] said, "My neighbors, why did you come after me?", to which they replied, "To persuade you to go back with us." But the man said, "I just can't do that. You live in the city called Destruction, the place where I too was born. I have seen that if you die there, you will sink lower than the grave, into a place that burns with fire and brimstone. Listen to me, my neighbors, and come with me!"

Obstinate: "What? And leave all our friends and our possessions behind?"

Christian: "Yes, because all that you forsake is not worthy to be compared to just a little of that which I'm seeking to find. If you come with me and also find it, you will be as blessed as I, for where I go there is more than enough to go around. Come on, and let me prove it to you!"

Obstinate: "What are you seeking, since you're leaving everything you own to find it?"

Christian: "I seek an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, which does not fade away. It is laid up in heaven, and is safe there, to be given to them that diligently seek it. Here, just read it in my book."

A little further on Christian's journey another person tries to dissuade him from his quest:

Christian: "Why, sir, this burden on my back is more terrible to me than all these things you have described. I don't care what troubles I meet with in the way, if I can also meet with deliverance from my burden."

Worldly Wiseman: "How did you come by such a burden in the first place?"

Christian: "By reading this book in my hand."

Worldly Wiseman: "Ah, I thought so. What has happened to you has happened to other weak men, who meddle with things too high for them and become distracted. Those distractions not only unnerve men, as I see they have done with you, but they lead them to go off on desperate ventures to find what they are seeking, which they really do not know."

Christian: "I know what I seek: relief from my heavy burden."

Worldly Wiseman: "But why do you seek it in this way, seeing that so many dangers come with it? Especially since, if you'll hear me out, I can tell you how to get what you want with encountering the dangers that you'll run into if you continue in the way. And besides, instead of those dangers, you will find safety, friendship, and contentment."

Certainly, each and every one of us is on a journey like the character called Christian. None of us has the exact same journey, but we all share similar challenges, similar temptations, and a common enemy. Satan and his minions are at work undermining the foundations of our narrow road. They use our weaknesses against us and cause us to doubt God's goodness and God's truth.

William Wilberforce was the champion against slavery and the slave trade in the British Empire of 300 years ago. He wrote:

"It is stated, that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan are both set up in the world, and that to the one or the other of these we must belong. "The righteous have *passed* from death unto life" — "they are delivered from the power of darkness, and are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son."* They have become "the children," and "the subjects of God." While on earth, they love his day, his service, his people; they "speak good of his name;" they abound in his works. Even here they are in some degree possessed of his image; by and by it shall be perfected; they shall awake up after his "likeness," and being "heirs of eternal life," they shall receive "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

The Apostle John warns us in his letter to the churches in the third chapter of 1 John 3:7–10 (NIV84)

⁷ Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he [Jesus] is righteous. ⁸ He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. ⁹ No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

Let those two citations suffice, but there are many others that could be used to establish our "either or" position. There are two camps, two kingdom, in which you can live. We are either with God or with the enemy of God. We cannot serve two masters.

Jesus taught much about the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. To really appreciate what it is about, we must recognize the implication of a King, an authority. This King has a dominion AND He exercises dominion over that kingdom. If we choose to live in the kingdom of God, then we are pledging to submit to the dominion of our God over our lives; every aspect of our lives. Remember the greatest commandment, to love God with all our heart, all our mind, all our strength, and all our soul - Whole heartedness; all in; no compromises.

Jesus taught in Matthew 13:44-46 (NIV84)

⁴⁴ "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

How many of us have taken hold of our treasure like there is nothing more valuable to us than the kingdom of God? This merchant was no fool. Upon finding the pearl amongst pearls, there was no sacrifice too great. Both of these men valued the kingdom of heaven beyond all other possessions. What has your faith cost you? Maybe you were told that you just have to accept Jesus into your heart. Just say this little prayer with me. Add Jesus to your life and things will get better. Go to church once a month, put part of your leftovers in the plate, say grace at dinnertime. Bada bing, bada boom your in like flint. No, I don't think so.

Paul reminds us in Colossians 2:13-15 (NIV84)

¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Oh yeah, that whole cross thing. Yes, God's gift of grace is free, but it cost Jesus the only begotten Son his life. So, why should we think that kingdom living would be easy? You can't earn your salvation. You can't deserve your salvation. You cannot pay God back for your salvation. Are you grateful? Are you joy filled taking up your cross and following Jesus?

My friends, I proclaim to you that Jesus is the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. He taught that the kingdom is at hand. The kingdom of God is in the midst of you. That kingdom is within you; if you are a true believer in the one and only Son of God. Over and over again Jesus proved the superiority of His Father's kingdom over Satan's kingdom. Frequently he cast out demons, even legions of demons. Frequently he thwarted the efforts of the enemy by healing the sick, lame, deaf and blind.

Do you ever worry? While I try to trust God completely, I confess that I sometimes worry. My friends, worry is a weapon of the liar and Deceiver. It creates chaos and confusion in us and it is very contagious. It doubts God's goodness. It doubts God's sovereignty. It doubts God's provision, protection and promises. Worry weakens our walk and our resolve. Worry feeds our fears and denies the power and love of our Lord.

This week, while driving with my wife Carol, I started to get very irritated. Inappropriately, I raised my voice and said to her, "Will you turn that radio off? I don't want to listen to any more news." When anything anywhere in the world goes wrong, you can be sure you will hear about it. This constant barrage of negativity is meant to discourage. It is an acid of anxiety that is eating away at our peace of mind.

No, I am not suggesting an ostrich mentality where we stubbornly hide our heads in the sand. It does not help that it seems every news source has an agenda other than reporting the facts of the situation. I understand that many aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been politicized, but give me some grace as I use the news reporting on this issue as an example.

The headlines are shouting about record number of cases of infections. One article, I read online, showed a graph of a scary depiction of these sharp increases. When I scrolled down further, there was another graph showing a steep decline in COVID-19 related deaths. Even while a record number of new cases were being reported, the back story was that deaths were significantly declining. Shouldn't that have been the headline?

Jesus' words are as true today as they were two thousand years ago. Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? The National Institute of Mental Health states on their website: "Over time, continued strain on your body from stress may contribute to serious health problems, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and other illnesses, including mental disorders such as [depression](#) or [anxiety](#)." So in reality, stress will reduce your lifespan.

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. In today's parlance, Jesus could have done a "mic drop" after that statement and walked boldly off the stage. There are some things we can control, but most things we cannot. We can only control our response to those circumstances. We struggle facing today and yet we add the weight of tomorrow on top. No wonder we feel crushed at times.

Again John Wesley: "Jesus forbids only that care which poisons the blessings of to-day, by fear of what may be tomorrow; which cannot enjoy the present plenty, through apprehensions of future want." A preacher named Beecher: "The past belongs to gratitude and regret; the present to contentment and work; the future to hope and trust."

And, Wilmot Buxton queries, "Will you shudder at winter's snow whilst the flowers of summer are growing around you?"

CONCLUSION:

Is Jesus talking about food and clothes relevant to us today? We live in a vastly different culture. Most of us take food and clothing for granted because of the wealth of our nation. This makes Jesus' words more relevant than ever. If the people in Jesus' day were told not to worry about the basic necessities of life, how much more should we heed his admonition to trust the God who knows all of our needs?

Certainly, we recognize the pertinence of the warning about worshiping wealth and the comforts that riches provide. We recognize it because our culture is immersed in that idolatry and too frequently we fall into that trap ourselves.

I am afraid that you might be getting tired of all my reminders about sin and unrighteousness in our day; but, here is a telling example. The Somerville, MA City Council voted on June 29th to approve an ordinance recognizing polyamorous domestic partnerships. In other words, marriage can be any mix of people you want. It does not seem that the human race has made any progress since the early days of Israel in acknowledging our holy God and the requisite righteousness required.

As I read through the Bible this year, there is a constant OT refrain. Though such and such a king followed the LORD, the high places were not removed; or, the king did not go into the temple of the LORD; or, the people continued to make sacrifices to other gods. Whenever we leave Satan a stronghold, you can be sure he will make forays to destroy our faith foundations.

Why do we fall short? Why do we hold back? We say we seek God, but insist on our own standards. Each one of us needs to make a radical commitment: seek ye first – before anything else – as our first priority – in preeminence – seek ye first your Father’s kingdom and your Father’s righteousness.

Philippians 3:8–9 (NIV84)

⁸What is more, I **consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ** (repeat bold) ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

So, I ask you again: What brought you here this morning?

Amen and amen. Let us pray.