

Seek First the Kingdom/Worrying

📖 Matthew 6:25-34

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Last time we discussed Jesus' teaching on earthly wealth and heavenly wealth. The setting was that the kingdom was 'at hand.' The kingdom offer was on the table and if the nation repented then the kingdom would come. The kingdom is portrayed by the OT prophets as a unique time when prosperity will far exceed any previous period of history. In light of that time the Lord has some strong words about storing up wealth like the scribes and Pharisees. Such wealth was temporary because in the world preceding the kingdom moths and rust destroy and what is not subject to moths and rust, thieves can break in and steal. His point was that you cannot be prepared for all the contingencies of life but you can be prepared for the kingdom. So rather than dwelling on trying to prepare for all the contingencies that characterize this fallen world His disciples should seek the kingdom first and thereby be storing up treasures in heaven where such contingencies as moths and rust destroying and thieves breaking in and stealing are out of the question. Such treasures would be restored to them in the kingdom for eternal enjoyment. Jesus further warns about the absolute devotion required by both God and wealth. Neither will accept a divided loyalty. Therefore in order to store up treasure in heaven you must be solely devoted to God, seeking His kingdom first and His righteousness.

One of the issues that came out of this was prepping for the future in the present church age. To be clear, what we are talking about here is not about taking care of one's family and preparing for the immediate future. Even the ant teaches us not to be lazy and to store up for the immediate future. I think what we are talking about is hoarding up in order to be prepared for some kind of crisis that could last several years where there's no food and water. There are three passages that I have found to be most helpful in addressing this issue. The first one is Luke 12 and it's been the most helpful. In verse 13 the context is Jesus responding to someone who is asking about his inheritance. "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." The core idea is that life is about much more than having things and that we need to guard against desiring things

because that's greed. In verse 16 "He told them a parable..." This is to illustrate the teaching. "The land of a rich man was very productive." Keep in mind this was an agricultural society. Riches were seen in terms of agriculture. This man's land was very productive. "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." The point is that the man was trying to secure his future by storing up riches for himself so he could just kick back and relax. But then he died suddenly and so what did his life count for? It counted for nothing. And so whenever you start to hoard for the future you get to the point where your life starts to revolve around that and that's when the problem is. The second passage is Col 3:2 and this one we've seen several times in the last several weeks. It reinforces the point we just made about the focus of your life. Here's what Paul has to say, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." He's not saying float off into never, never land. He's saying don't let the concerns of earth be what you are constantly setting your mind on. Don't let them consume you. I'd say that when you are watching or reading the news every day and you spend hours doing this then inevitably you are setting your mind on the things on earth. That is what Paul is saying don't do. Turn that stupid thing off, stop reading every news article. That is very destructive to having the right outlook on life. It fosters fear. At the same time I don't mean be ignorant. I just mean that the media pumps this stuff like morphine into people's minds and it takes over their thought life. They can't stop thinking about it and it just frustrates them to no end. Read the Bible. That's what Paul means by set your mind on the things above. Study the Scripture. Imagine what your mind would be thinking about if you spent all the time you spend watching and reading the news reading the Bible. Think about that because you're going to pump something into your system and the thing you pump the most is what you're going to set your mind on and it's going to control your life. So I think that if your focus is on preparing for the future because you are scared of what you might have to face then you're operating on the wrong motives. The third passage is 1 John 4:18 and this one addresses the fear issue. This passage is about love and interestingly love is not set against hate. That's what we find in the thesaurus, the antonym of love is hate. Not so in the Bible. In the Bible the antonym of love is fear. What does John say, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear..." I think just in principle that fear is not a proper motivating factor. If you're in fear then the decisions you make will not normally be the right decisions. Fear is not a proper motive. Fear will affect you in many ways. Fear is from Satan and the only way to get rid of it is to replace it with God's love. And so I definitely think this passage relates in principle to the prepping mentality because once you go past six months or a year it requires a lot of thought and energy to prepare for that and that's got to be motivated by fear. So in the end Luke 12, Col 3 and 1 John 4 teach that we should not

hoard up for the future because it betrays where our focus is, it betrays that our thought life is dominated by the things of the earth and it betrays that as a result fear has become the motivating factor in our life. And again, this is not saying don't provide for your family and store up for the immediate future. It is saying don't hoard up because it will distract you from the central thing that is important in life.

Tonight in Matt 6:25-34 there is a continuance of this theme but there is a shift in focus. Whereas vv 19-24 taught that our focus should not be on hoarding up things for the future, vv 25-34 teaches that our focus should not even be on worrying about our daily needs. This again comes in an at hand kingdom context. So the kingdom was about to come if Israel repented and then there would be all the wealth of the kingdom but there is also secondary application to the present age in light of the postponement of the kingdom.

Jesus says, **For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on.** For what reason does Paul say this? For the reason at the end of verse 24 that no one can "serve God and wealth." The principle is that both require undivided loyalty. While giving one's loyalty to wealth over God is easy enough to see there is also the danger of giving one's loyalty to worrying about daily provisions. While the rich may be in view in vv 19-24, the poor seem to be in view in vv 25ff. The rich store up in order to secure the future but this is wrong because it doesn't take into account the temporality of this world; the poor worry about present needs but this is wrong because it manifests lack of faith that God will provide. So they both distract from allegiance to God and that is really the issue in this section, being distracted away by the cares of this world and not putting God's interests first. Seeing that both rich and poor are now in view it seems possible to me that the crowds have now moved in and Jesus' teaching which was originally directed to the disciples only (cf 5:1ff) is now directed to a larger audience. Certainly by the end of the teaching the crowds have moved in (cf 7:28-29). Where exactly they move in is a matter of debate and very difficult to determine but it seems plausible to me that they have now come in so that there are those who are rich and poor present.

The command in verse 25 is **do not be worried about your life**. It's a present imperative just like the command in verse 19 "do not store up." Since there it meant "stop storing up," here it means "stop being worried." The implication is the poor were worrying about trifling things such as daily food, drink and clothing. The Greek word **worried** is from the Greek word *μεριμνατε* and means "to be apprehensive, have anxiety, be anxious, be (unduly) concerned."¹ The poor were overly concerned about two things that had distracted them from allegiance to God. They needed to stop being so concerned about these things.

The two things they were worried about were their **life** and their **body**. The Greek word for **life** is *ψυχη*, which is the "soul." Too often the "soul" is thought of as the immaterial part of man. Scripturally the soul can be used purely as the immaterial part but other times it is used of the material part and still others to the total person, both material and immaterial. This usage clearly has in mind the needs of the material body such as **food** and **drink**. **Life** then refers to daily needs that must be met to support physical existence. Glasscock agrees saying, "...one should understand Christ's exhortation not to be anxious about life to be a reference to physical existence. Life itself should not be a matter of anxiety. Even food and drink, which are necessary to preserve basic life function, is not to be of extraordinary concern."² Note that the command is not against any concern, but against these things as a chief concern.

Next Jesus says that you should not **be worried...for your body**. Is what you drape over your physical body really something you should be anxious about? Food, drink and clothing are mundane needs of the physical body. All Jesus is saying is that they had allowed these things to become the central focus of their lives and thereby made the trivial the momentous and the momentous trivial. What should have truly been momentous? The kingdom. It was on the verge of breaking into history.

Jesus now sets forth four reasons why they should not be overly concerned about these things. First, life is more than physical existence. Verse 25, **Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?** Life is more than what they ate and what they wore. What they ate and wore just sustained their physical lives and covered them so they could focus on kingdom interests. But if they were focused on these things then they would miss the need to be spiritually prepared to accept the kingdom offer.

The second argument is verse 26, God takes care of birds and are you not more valuable than birds? **Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?** This is the exact same argument we saw in Romans last Sunday, the **much more** argument, what we called *a fortiori*. Remember that argument? It means "from a yet stronger reason." In other words, if it's true that God feeds the birds, then from a yet stronger reason God will feed them. The question arises here, "If this is true then why do some Christians die of famine or cold?" Simple. This was given in an 'at hand' kingdom context to Israel and during that time God will preserve the believing remnant of Israel and bring them into the kingdom. So it's not a general promise, it's a specific promise. But I do think it generally holds true in the Church age and we'll see that there is an application by way of Providence for Christians, it's just not absolute. Some Christians have been caught up in the effects of the Fall and died from starvation or cold.

So the point here is they should reason properly from the theological teaching that man and nature are distinct and man is more important than nature. Man is not a part of nature. Man was made in the

image of God to be the lord of nature by being a good steward of nature and bringing it into fruitful production. If then God takes care of the birds who are just a part of nature then will not God much more take care of them? Referring to his disciples? Of course.

There are lessons embedded in nature and it's these lessons that TV and video games get in the way of because people are too busy building callouses on their thumbs. I was talking to a pastor friend of mine a few weeks ago and we were talking about the age of our kids and his kids are older than mine and he said, "Whatever you do, do not get a video game system." And this guy is very grace-oriented. He's not a legalist and I was a little surprised by his tone. But when he was looking at me all I could see in his eyes was total frustration with his home life. He had bought his boys one and it has become the bane of his existence. Those games are addictive and so are all the other little techno gadgets in your life from iPhones to the internet to TV and movies. They all do the same thing neurologically and studies have been done that show that what they do is stimulate the accomplishment and pleasure center in your brain. The problem is you haven't accomplished anything. That's the problem with all these things. They give a feedback signal of accomplishment but you haven't accomplished anything. But the hormones that are released from that center of our brain when it is stimulated are so addictive that rather than work to accomplish something we sit and veg out and get the same effect. Their having problems with this in China, serious problems and we're having problems with it to. They now have addiction centers that people are admitted into for technology addictions. This stuff will take over your life. My point is that you get so involved in staring at your game or your iPhone that you rarely get outside and you never observe nature and therefore you miss all the lessons God has built into creation around you! Just as an example, we're in deer season and I like to hunt and the other day I was studying all the passages on deer in the Bible and here's a lesson. Do you know why a doe gives birth to her calf? Do you know what stimulates the actual birthing process? The voice of the Lord makes the deer to calve. That's Ps 29:9. God calls the calf forth! Now if that is true then much more I think it is true with the birth of a human. And yet what do we do? Intervene because it's not convenient! God's not done working in there. What in the world are you doing in there? But we don't learn the lessons God has embedded in nature anymore and therefore we're stupid.

Here's a lesson from ornithology, the **birds**. **Birds** don't have to work for their food. Jesus says **they do not sow, nor reap**. They don't plant and harvest. God supplies their food. All they have to do is gather the food. And they certainly don't **gather** heaps of food **into barns** in order to prepare for the far distant future. They just gather each day what they need. What's the lesson? Will not God much more provide for your needs? Why do you worry then? In fact, didn't God try to teach the Israelites the same lesson with the manna in the wilderness? Each day they were to go out and collect only enough for that day! And what did they try to do? Collect enough for the next day too. Why did they do that? Because they didn't trust their heavenly Father to provide. Had they learned the lesson from the birds? And what

were the consequences? It didn't go so well for them. But God loved them so much He wouldn't allow them to live by sight; He wanted them to learn to live by faith; to trust Him to provide! **Look at the birds** God says! There is a lesson there that they were supposed to learn. He provided for their needs on a daily basis. There was no need to worry about it. Now, of course, that directly applies to Israel when the kingdom is 'at hand,' and we are the Church and don't live when the kingdom is 'at hand," but I still think there is a general lesson here for us in that we shouldn't excessively be concerned about food and drink. You are made in God's image and you are much more valuable than a bird.

The third argument is verse 27, worrying is not going to extend your life. **And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?** It could even be argued that it will shorten your life. The Greek word translated **hour** is *ηλικια* and can refer to a cubit, a length of about 18 inches. Some think Jesus is saying that who of you by being worried can add any height to his stature. But the word can also mean the length of one's life and I think it's much more likely that it's being used for the length of one's life. People don't usually worry too much about their stature but they do worry about extending their life. So the point is why worry if it can't extend your life? What's the point? It just manifests lack of faith.

The fourth argument is verse 28, if God clothes the flowers then how much more will God clothe you? This is another **much more** argument. **And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!** This is another lesson God embedded in nature. But if we're too busy playing video games and building our mansions to pay attention to the flowers then we miss the lesson! It's even been reduced now to artificial flowers. What a joke! If you've ever paid attention to real flowers then you see the obvious flaws in artificial flowers. That's why it's so important to make purposeful observations of the flowers. Purposeful, because it's not just the flower, it's the God behind the flower you're observing, it's Him that is being put on display, His brilliance. God designed flowers with shocking beauty and stunning patterns; they're utterly amazing. So amazing that verse 29 says that **not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.** Now if that is so and Solomon brought in tribute from all the surrounding nations and Solomon had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots and food for all who visited his table and food for all his horses and he built the finest Temple in the world, one of the seven wonders of the world and decked it out with the finest furniture in the world made of the finest lumber and gold and silver and bronze and built by the most skilled workmen and he opened up trade with the East and had the finest of silks, fabrics and spices imported lavishly into his kingdom. So lavish that the Queen of Sheba was utterly astonished. If he was that wealthy and yet **not even...in all his glory clothed...like one of these, just one,** then I'd say you're hard pressed to design anything as beautiful

as a flower. There's just something about the depth and the texture that is beyond man's capability. And yet people could care less about the flowers. They miss the lesson. What's the lesson of verse 28 and 30? In verse 28 the lesson is that the flowers **don't toil nor do they spin**. Well if they don't have to do any kind of labor to get the cotton to spin the thread to make themselves then how are they clothed so beautifully? Verse 30, God just clothes them and in garments far superior to any human garment ever made! **If** that is so, and it is, 1st class condition, then **will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!** Three times in Jesus' ministry we have this condemnation, **ye of little faith!** Think about the magnitude of that condemnation. You've got the entire world of flowers clothed every spring from God on high and here you are made in God's image and you're worried about what you're going to wear? What a pathetic picture! **Ye of little faith!**

Verse 31, summary commandments. **Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things.** By the way, if we'd been living then that would have been us, we'd be the **Gentiles**. We'd be doing what many Christians are doing today and I don't mean to leave the primary interpretation of the Scripture as it applies to Israel here, but we haven't done much better. The Church has worried about these things and sought these things too. The verb **seek** here is prefixed by a preposition which intensifies the seeking, which is why they translated it **eagerly seek**. The Gentiles eagerly strive for and give undue concern to these mundane things! But Israel should not be like Gentiles. Their **heavenly Father knows that they need all these things**. It's therefore worthless to seek them. God already knows what they need. He's not stupid. He's omniscient. So why seek these things like pagans? And the same thing applies to us. Why give undue concern to food and **drink** and **clothing**? Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Those things are necessary but those things are not what life's about.

What is life about? And here you see the kingdom context clearly. Verse 33, **But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.** It's a command with a promise attached. What was the chief thing they should be seeking? **His kingdom and His righteousness**. The two really go together. It may be shocking to say they were not to be seeking God first; it may be shocking to say they were not to be seeking Messiah first. But guess what it's true! They were to be seeking **first His kingdom and His righteousness**. What's the promise attached if they did seek His kingdom and righteousness first? **All these things will be added to you.** George N. H. Peters says, "If we consider that this was said before the postponement of the Kingdom when the Kingdom was offered on the condition of repentance, we see at once how this would have been fulfilled just as given. For, if the nation had repented and the Kingdom would have been re-established then under the marvelous influence of the Spirit, just as predicted by the prophets, "all these things" would have been added, seeing that under this Spirit's influence abundance and plenty for all classes is expressly promised. Aside from the grace of God which now even in response to faith so often inchoately verifies

the promise, it still points us on when the Kingdom itself shall be attained and there will be no lack, owing to the power and manifestation of the Spirit."³ Don't ever confuse it. Everything is going to His kingdom and His righteousness. This is His chief desire and it should have been their chief desire and it should be a top desire for us as well as I'll show in a minute. Everything else as far as priority is under this. How did Jesus say to pray in 6:9? That His name be hallowed in the kingdom, related to the kingdom; that His kingdom come, clearly related to the kingdom; that the will of God be done on earth as it is in heaven, again related to the kingdom. Those are the three chief interests they were to have in their prayer life and they all relate to His kingdom and His righteousness being done on earth in the kingdom because it relates directly to His name, His reputation before all nations, a reputation which is now in disrepute! But not forever. Is this something new? Seeking the kingdom? What did Amos say? This is nothing new. Amos 5:24, "But let justice role down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." That's what God desires. Righteousness in the kingdom. What did Jeremiah say? Jer 9:24, "but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD." So if they weren't delighting in these things, if they weren't seeking these things first then their delights were not the LORD's delights. This is a huge issue. It's the biggest thing in the Bible and it's hardly ever talked about, very rarely understood. And what is it? God's kingdom program. Instead we've got amillennialists running around telling us there is no more kingdom than what is now in the saints in heaven or the saints in heaven and on earth. If that is the case where is the righteousness? What a load of bull. Why isn't Satan bound? Oh, he's on a long leash we're told. Hogwash. Then we've got progressive dispensationalists and they want to find some middle ground so they've got a spiritual kingdom now in heaven and an earthly kingdom not yet on earth. So they want to play on both sides of the fence. They like to say that in Matt 4:17 Jesus is teaching that those who repented were entering a spiritual kingdom at that time. That He was not speaking of a restored earthly kingdom. That is such hogwash. This is a game of picking and choosing which meaning of kingdom you want to insert into the text. Where is the kingdom ever re-defined as anything other than the earthly, Davidic, covenanted kingdom? There are no passages that re-define the kingdom as some kind of spiritual kingdom now. There is one kingdom prophesied, it's Davidic, it's earthly, it's spiritual too and it's a restoration of God's righteousness on earth. When did the kingdom program begin? In the Garden. A righteous kingdom is what God originally set out to establish with Adam. The Bible begins with a Garden and ends with a City. The Garden was inhabited by the first king, Adam, and he was to spread that garden kingdom over the face of the whole earth. He failed. The city will be inhabited by the eternal king, Jesus Christ, and He will rule forever. History is not finished until every enemy is put down, when He returns He will rule for 1,000 years and then the last enemy, death, will be abolished and we will go into the eternal City. So if you really understand God's kingdom program then everything else in the Bible will fall into place. But if you neglect the kingdom doctrine you're going to be confused, utterly confused, mixing things that

should not be mixed. I think Alva McClain has written the best book on it. George N. H. Peters has written on it in the 1800's but it's very long and detailed. Marvelous work, just very long. But it's worth investigating because once you understand the kingdom everything else falls into place.

We're the church and we live in the postponement of the kingdom so are we supposed to be **seeking His kingdom**? Praying for His kingdom to come? His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven? His righteousness to fill the world? I think so and I realize we're the church and we're to be seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, but understand that He's sitting there building His Church so that we will be trained to reign in the kingdom. So by seeking the things above we are seeking the will of God that is being done in heaven right now and wanting it to be done on the earth in the kingdom. The point is these desires relate because right now the Church is being built and when it's complete then Christ is going to come for us in the air at the rapture and take us to the judgment seat to be rewarded. But that is not our final destiny. The mansions in John 14 are not mansions, the Greek word refers to temporary dwellings, and after we are there for a temporary time then we'll come to earth with Christ at His Second Coming and then we will serve in His kingdom. So that's how this all works because ultimately we're going to heaven but then on to the kingdom.

Is the attached promise that **all these things will be added unto you** also for us? I think you have to be careful here because as I mentioned earlier, some Christians die from starvation and cold. So the primary interpretation is directed toward those who are living during the time of a genuine kingdom offer but Peters does make some application to the Church when he says, "*a particular Providence has been extended down to all the believing children of Abraham; in some instances astonishingly exhibited and in others less marked, but still existing as the divine assurances declare and personal experience confirms. We only add: The relationship that saints now sustain to Jesus as intended co-rulers in the Coming Kingdom insures from Him a deep and abiding interest in their welfare (even trial and suffering being intended to bring in additional rank and honor), because His own glory and that of His kingdom is connected with it.*"⁴ So he sees that often God has providentially provided for the Church but he wouldn't absolutize it and I agree. If this seems to belittle the necessities of everyday life McClain says, "If at times He seems somewhat indifferent to the physical needs of human existence (Matt. 6:25-31), it is only because He is anxious to put first things first. When men have made the Kingdom of God a matter of primary concern, all these other temporal benefits shall be added unto them (Matt. 6:33)."⁵

However, after the Church is complete and the rapture takes place then a future generation of Israel will come and the kingdom will be preached as 'at hand' and this command **Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness** will again become chiefly relevant. They'll need to get their priorities straight. These are the things that delight Him. And if they do there's a promise attached. What's the promise? **And all these things will be added unto you.** They won't have to worry about what to eat, what to drink or

what to wear. God will provide all that. Doesn't He do that for the birds? Doesn't He do that for the lilies of the field? If He does it for these lesser things then how much more would He do it for them?

What does it look like to **seek first His kingdom and His righteousness**? For those who were living when the kingdom was 'at hand' it would mean to put kingdom interests and kingdom righteousness before everything else. What would this accomplish? They would be salt and light. As salt and light their teaching and their living would influence others bringing them to repentance that was necessary for the kingdom to come. What's the end of being salt and light? The glory of God and treasure in heaven. Is that working? Do you see how this all fits together?

¹ BDAG entry for *μεριμνω*.

² Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, p 155.

³ George N. H. Peters. *The Theocratic Kingdom, Volume III*, p 79.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 341-2.

⁵ Alva McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, p 290.