

Seeking the Kingdom by Trusting the King

Matthew 6:33

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"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 'Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.'" (Matthew 6:25-34 ESV)

Our series on the kingdom of God in the gospel of Matthew brings us to a key verse in Matthew and a special verse in my life. Have you ever heard of a "life verse"? Did you know that all good Christians have a "life verse"? Actually, that's not true, because all verses should be life verses. But if you grew up in "Christianville" like I did, you were expected to have a life verse. Most of my schooling was in public schools but I did graduate from a Christian high school. I remember them asking us for the yearbook, *what is your life verse?* We had to have one and it was listed under our picture in the high school yearbook. I dug it out. Here is 17-year-old Pastor Steve.

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Brent Abbey
II Thessalonians 2:16-17



Ann Clark
Psalms 73:28



Kevin Cross
Philippians 4:13



Steve DeWitt
Matthew 6:33



Jeff Elmore
Ephesians 5:20



Jane Graham
I Corinthians 10:13

Notice the verse. *Matthew 6:33*. My life verse. Thirty years later I am teaching my life verse for the first time that I can remember.

Its location is in Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). This sermon describes the inner and outer life of a citizen of the kingdom of God. Remember, the kingdom of God is the reign of God through Christ. When a person pledges allegiance to Jesus by faith in him as personal Savior, the reign of God assumes authority in his or her life. Jesus becomes king. We are then citizens of the kingdom of God.

In this passage Jesus describes the anxieties that dominate the kingdom of man and why the kingdom of God is so radically different. *"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on."* (Matthew 6:25) He repeats the three in verse 31. What you eat. What you drink. Your body. We might call it health today. These represent man's most basic needs. What are they trying to get to Haiti and the Bahamas as a result of Hurricane Matthew? Food. Clean water. Health. What are the two most important facilities in any town? The grocery store and the hospital. Why? When you get right down to it, what do we really need? Food. Water. Body care.

So in the kingdom of man, what are people obsessing over? Those basic necessities and how they can get them. When these concerns are of utmost importance, what goes with it? Anxiety. Worry. Fear. *Will my needs be met? Will I have enough?*

Jesus points out that birds need food but they don't worry about it. (Verse 26) The flowers don't worry at all and look how beautiful their clothing is. (Verses 28-29) Simple stuff, right? Jesus says, what good does all this anxiety, worry, and fretting do? (Verse 27)

Jesus is doing a word play here and I want you to see it. He uses a word to describe the kingdom of man's frantic obsession. *Seek*. They are desperately seeking these things. It's what they are thinking about. It's what they are talking about. Conversation in the kingdom of man is about material things, money, power, pleasures, and whatever adds to the sense of significance and security. Obsession with the election and political power. Yet what is true about material things—even food, water, and health? In the kingdom of man they can be stolen, lose value; hurricanes and the storms of life can sweep them away. Life is so uncertain. You can work out every day and still get cancer. You can never smoke and still get heart disease. In the kingdom of man, everything is uncertain and precarious.

So what emotion dominates the kingdom of man? Fear. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association (yes, that is a real organization), anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in America affecting 40 million adults. (<https://www.adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>) Anxiety disorders cost Americans \$42 billion a year. This in the country with the most abundance of food, water, and clothing in the history of the world. Even with all of this wealth, we live in terror. *"For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all."* (Verse 32)

For all mankind's advancements and technology, in the end, all he has is himself. He is his own god. He must meet his own needs. Yet in this vast universe, what power or control do humans really have? One hurricane shuts down much of the eastern seaboard. What do we control? What do you control? It's no wonder we live with constant fear. Officially or unofficially, we are all members of the Anxiety and Depression Association.

But the kingdom of God is ruled by the one true God who Jesus describes here as our "heavenly Father." (Verse 26) That is a paternal title of relationship and endearment. We live in the kingdom of our heavenly Father.

*"This is my Father's world:
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world:
Why should my heart be sad?
The Lord is King: let the heavens ring!
God reigns; let earth be glad!"*
(Maltbie D. Babcock, "This is My Father's World," 1901).

The Christian is freed from the obsessive concern for our future needs being met. Why? Our Heavenly Father is in charge. He knows what our needs are. He promises to meet them. Jesus is urging us away from self-trust and self-reliance for our future and toward a trusting in God's promise to be there for us no matter what comes.

Now here is the word play. The Gentiles "seek" these things. They are all about the kingdom of man. But not us. Because our trust is in God's ability to meet our needs, our "seekings" can be entirely different. That is verse 33, *"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."*

The kingdom of God is the reign and glory of God. His righteousness describes God's righteous desires for us. Right thinking. Right priorities. Right living. Seek it. Seek it obsessively and more than man pursues the kingdom of man. Like a hungry man might seek food, the Christian seeks whatever will advance the glory of God in the world. Like a thirsty man might seek water, the Christian seeks after the spiritual priorities in his life. Jesus is encouraging ambitious, obsessive seeking but seeking the kingdom of God OVER the kingdom of man. Way over.

That's why that word "first" is in there. We seek those things first, not only. Do we need food? Yes. Like the birds, we should hunt and gather. Do we need water and clothing? Yes. Like the flowers of the field we should grow roots and provide that need. So the Christian doesn't ignore these entirely.

First is a word of priority and importance. You can pursue career excellence, but your first priority is the kingdom of God. You can raise your children and treasure the domestic experience, but your first priority is the kingdom of God. You can work diligently as a student while having your kingdom of God "GPA" as your first priority. **First doesn't mean nothing else, it means nothing else is first.**

Which kingdom are you seeking? What or who are you seeking as most important in your life?

But what about my needs? What about food and clothing and shelter and health and other needs? Verse 33 is a command that brings with it a wonderful promise. *"AND all these things will be added to you."* (Matthew 6:33, emphasis added) What things will be added? The things we need. Food. Water. Clothing. Seek the kingdom of God first and your heavenly Father will provide them for you. Hear that? Fear wants to know the future. Worry wants to control the future. Faith trusts in the God who both knows and controls the future. Divine Fatherhood and fear don't go together.

What if my daughters woke up every day terrified that I might not take care of them? "Daddy, are you going to feed me today? Daddy, am I going to get to drink any water today?" I wouldn't be a very good dad if my daughters lived in panic that I might not take care of them. And I'm just a human being. Imagine if I was God Almighty and every resource in the universe was mine. How could my daughters wake up anything but totally confident that Daddy is going to provide food for me? Daddy is going to provide a drink for me. Daddy is going to take care of me. What are you really afraid of? Might our worries and fears indicate that our primary "seekings" are not the kingdom of God?

Imagine all the worrying that might simply go away if we believed God will, in the future, add all these things unto us. That's Jesus finale. *"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."* (Verse 34) Jesus doesn't say there won't be any troubles. He acknowledges there will be. He knew troubles greater than any of ours. But in the kingdom of God, all troubles have accompanying promises. So I don't know what tomorrow's trouble will be. What I do know is that God's provision will be there too.

Why Should I Seek the Kingdom if I Already Have It?

Doesn't a Christian already have the kingdom? Yes. But the kingdom is something to have and something to seek. Marriage is a good analogy. When a man takes a wife, he has a wife. Great! Congratulations! But having a wife requires something of the husband. He must continue to seek her. How? She must continue to have first place in his heart. There are lots of competing interests in a man's heart, but enough about the football season. She must be over any and all other relationships. A man seeks his wife by actively placing her needs and desires ahead of any other desire. *When he seeks her like this, he has a wife and he seeks his wife.* As he does, the blessings of marriage are more fully his as a result of his seeking her first. He has more of marriage by having more of her.

That's what Jesus is urging about the kingdom of God. Yes, enter it, have it by faith. But that is only the beginning of experiencing the blessings of the kingdom that come to us personally when we seek God's kingdom above all else.

How Do We Seek the Kingdom of God?

It takes a coup d'état

My high school French is rusty but "coup d'état" is pretty common language. A coup is when one government is quickly overthrown by another. Famous coups include Absalom taking over David's kingdom; Julius Caesar being murdered by Brutus; and Napoleon taking over France. Typically, a military leader leverages the army against the political leader and then sets up a new government.

Spiritually, the same is true in our hearts. King Satan and his vice kings of money, security, health, fear, pride, and self-love are firmly enthroned in our hearts. They will not leave without a fight.

This is why this message will do little for some people here today. You can teach and preach and make eloquent exegesis without any coup d'état. The only way these demigods of our hearts are removed is if we perceive there to be a better, more powerful, more wonderful king and kingdom. Like the Romanians who forcibly removed Ceausescu when freedom and democracy took hold, we remove the kingdom of fear's grip by the power of a new

affection. A greater one. A better one. It is a coup and the revolutionary is Jesus. *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."* (Romans 1:16)

Is Jesus your king? Has that coup taken place in your heart where you pledged your allegiance to Jesus? An allegiance over any other? The Bible calls this faith. It is a coup d'état of the heart and a necessary first step to seek first the kingdom of God. Have you joined the revolution?

Saturate yourself with the kingdom

Before moving to Northwest Indiana, I lived in Indianapolis. Guess what was on the news all the time? The Indianapolis Colts. The players. The games. The storylines. Colts, Colts, Colts. You know what happened? I became a Colts fan.

Then I moved here. Guess what is on the news all the time? The Bears. The players. The games. The storylines. Bears, Bears, Bears. You know what has happened? I'm a Bears fan. Not as much though in recent years.

Our hearts get excited about the things we place before it as most important. Saturate yourself with the kingdom of man's priorities and guess what your heart will be excited about? That's why in God's plan he established outposts of kingdom culture—the church. The culture of a biblical church cultivates seeking the kingdom first because that's what everybody's talking about. Kingdom relationships stoke kingdom values. That assumes that here, the King and the kingdom are really what we are about. Are they?

The Word of God cultivates kingdom priority. Prayer releases kingdom priorities. Serving. Giving. Loving. These are countercultural for the kingdom of man but are the oxygen in the kingdom of God. Saturate yourself with kingdom culture and people and they will increase your seeking first the kingdom of God.

Celebrate the kingdom

You can tell what you care about by what you celebrate. Anniversaries mean marriage is important. Birthdays mean human life is important. In the kingdom, we need to celebrate what our King celebrates. Like what? What does heaven do when one sinner repents? The angels dance.

The Beatitudes list what heaven applauds: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit.... those who mourn.... the meek.... those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."* etc. (Matthew 5:3-6) All of these are qualities of the genuine Christian. Jesus delights to see these in his kingdom. Christian, these are the things to celebrate in your homes, small groups, and families. Let's get excited when the kingdom wins.

I've said this to families after a baptism, "Are you going to go and celebrate?" *I don't know.* Really, what's bigger? Baptism or birthday? Baptism or graduation? Baptism or whatever? What's a big deal in the kingdom? Let's celebrate it! Affirm indicators of the kingdom in one another. "Brother, I love to see your humility." "Sister, I love to see your acts of service."

What do we want more than anything?

- We want God's glory to spread by the advancement of the gospel in hearts and lives of people.
- We want God's kingdom to invade the territory of the enemy by shining the light of the glory of Jesus.
- We want people to be freed from living in terror and fear and to live instead in the confident expectation of God's provision now and forever.

Everywhere that happens, the citizens of the kingdom should rejoice and celebrate. The kingdom is here. The kingdom is spreading. The King is coming. Let all who love him seek him first, his kingdom, and his righteousness.

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