

Kingdom Living (Matthew 6:33)

based on a sermon by Steve Andrews

One night, a group of thieves broke into a jewelry store. But rather than stealing anything, they simply switched all the price tags. The next shoppers were unaware of what the thieves had done. The expensive jewels had suddenly become cheap, and the costume jewelry, which had been virtually worthless before, was suddenly very expensive. Customers who thought they were purchasing valuable gems were getting fakes. Those who couldn't afford the higher priced items were leaving the store with treasures.

Our world is like that jewelry store. It's like someone came in and switched all the price tags. It's hard to tell what is of value and what is not. In our world great value is given to the accumulation of material wealth and the power that goes with it. Our world puts a high price on popularity, prestige, beauty, and fame. But Jesus taught that such things are virtually worthless in the only "jewelry store" that matters: the kingdom of God.

- Developing a Kingdom mentality is what we are going to look at this morning.
- We are going to see what matters in the Kingdom of God and how to develop it in our daily lives.
- What is the Kingdom of God? How do we seek it in our lives? What is the purpose of the Kingdom of God? How does it reside in us? These are some of the questions I want you to ask as we open God's Word today.

One of the first verses I memorized after Jesus saved me was Matthew 6:33. This verse is a great promise of God to meet the needs of His children. In his sermon on the mount Jesus teaches about not worrying starting in verse 25 where He says, "**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?**" And he sums up His teaching in Matthew 6:33 saying, "**But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**" This verse is an incredible promise, but if you are like me you may be guilty of focusing on the wrong things in this verse. Too many times I think I have focused on the "**all these things will be given to you,**" instead of the "**seek first His kingdom.**" With emphasis on God provision, we often lose sight of other significant issues of Kingdom Living. It seems I am still having trouble with those switched price tags.

This verse seems simple enough, "**But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**" But just like a shiny gem in a jewelry case there is often more than meets the eye. To get at the real value, you must look at the gem with a magnifying lens. That's what we are going to do with this verse today.

In SBC Life magazine Charles Lowery told the story of the old man with the ugly, mangy, old yellow dog. An arrogant young man challenged the older man's dog to a dog fight. "My dog will whip your dog," said the young man. The older gentleman politely refused the challenge saying it would not be safe or right for the dogs to fight. But, the young man gave an order for his dog to attack the old man's mangy yellow dog. When the dust settled and the arrogant young man's dog was soundly defeated, he asked what kind of mangy yellow dog just whipped his prize fighting dog. The old man said, "Before I cut off his tail and painted him yellow, my dog was an alligator!" Like the alligator dog, Matthew 6:33 has a bigger bite than most of us think.

Let's dig in to this verse for a few minutes. First I want us to:

1. SEE THE REALITY: Jesus Is King Over a Kingdom

Jesus said to "**Seek first the Kingdom of God.**" Jesus taught a lot about the kingdom. In I think you could prove it was the primary topic of His preaching and teaching. In the Gospel of Matthew alone the word "**kingdom**" is used 56 times in 54 different verses. When Jesus began His public ministry we went out preaching, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**" (Matthew 4:17 NKJV).

Jesus declares the existence of a heavenly kingdom. He calls it the "**Kingdom of Heaven**" and the "**Kingdom of God.**" And He seems to use these phrases interchangeably, that is, the heavenly kingdom is the Kingdom of God. So where is the kingdom of God? Jesus preached that the kingdom of God was near, it was close by, it was immediately present. So can we see it? Can we go visit it? Where is this kingdom of God?

The kingdom is where the king rules and reigns. Why could Jesus say "**the kingdom of heaven is at hand**"? Because Jesus is the King, and where the King is, there is the kingdom. How do you get to be a part of this kingdom? By having Jesus as your king. It comes by a spiritual transformation. You have to be changed from the inside out. Jesus called it being born again. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3, "**I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.**" (John 3:3 NIV). You enter into His kingdom by being born of God. John 1:12 tells us how, "**But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.**" So being born again comes by receiving Jesus, by believing in Him.

His instruction to seek first His kingdom reminds us that there is more to reality than what we can see, feel, hear, or taste. The prophet Isaiah warned of those who had eyes but could not see and ears but could not hear. When His disciples asked Jesus why he taught in parables, He explained that truth about the kingdom is a secret that cannot be understood by those dominated by material things and calloused hearts (see Matt. 13).

When Paul prayed for the saints at Ephesus he prayed for God to open the eyes of their heart (Ephesians 1:18). Why? Because genuine faith is a spiritual reality that goes beyond what our physical eyes can see. It transcends our material existence. Jesus' kingdom is different from other kingdoms. Jesus said to Pilate, **"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."** (John 18:36).

Jesus' kingdom is not only different from others, but His kingdom has enemies. You have an enemy who is opposed to Christ and His followers. Before Jesus went out to preach the kingdom of God, Satan tempted Him by offering to give Him all the kingdoms of the world. Satan fancies himself as a king. He rules as the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2). John Eldredge said this about the kingdom, *"To live in ignorance of spiritual warfare is the most naïve and dangerous thing a person can do. It's like skipping through the worse part of town late at night, waving your wallet above your head. It's like walking into an al-Qaida training camp, wearing an I love the USA t-shirt. It's like swimming with great sharks, dressed as a wounded sea lion and smeared with blood."* (Eldredge, Wake the Dead, p. 152). When we fail to appreciate the uniqueness of kingdom authority and the opposition to the reign of Christ we make a critical mistake.

We must see the reality of the kingdom of God. Jesus is King. Then we must:

2. SET A PRIORITY: Seek First God's Kingdom.

Jesus is the ruler of a new kingdom, and he calls His followers to make pursuing His kingdom a priority. Jesus says to **"seek first"** the kingdom of God. The New Living Translation says, **"make the kingdom of God your primary concern."** The word **"first"** is not simply a reference to time but importance. Jesus is not saying to seek the kingdom God first and then seek the things of this world. He is saying that seeking the kingdom is our only objective. *"The sense of above all things is obvious in Matthew 6:33, for Jesus is not teaching that we should seek the kingdom first and then other things, but that there should be an exclusive orientation to the divine kingdom and righteousness."* (Kittel, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, p.966).

We do not pursue His kingdom as the first of several stops on a journey. This was the problem in Galatia where the apostle Paul rebuked the church for turning to legalistic practices to maintain their salvation after having trusted in Christ first for salvation. Jesus Christ is the King. So Christ alone is sufficient to equip us for His kingdom. It is only through Christ we have the promise from God to meet the needs that often cause us to worry. The Bible says, **"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave Him up for us all; how will He not also along with Him gracious give us all things?"** (Rom. 8:32 NIV).

Jesus not only tells us that the kingdom is to be first but He tells us to “**seek**” it. It’s more than just having an awareness that God is first and greater than other things. Jesus commands us to seek His kingdom. Our seeking involves a choice. God does not force us to seek Him. The Bible says His spirit draws us (Jn. 6:44), but He does not force us. He loves us first, but He does not make us love Him. We cannot seek God just by accident. Seeking has to be a deliberate choice. You must have the heart that says, “*Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, I want to see You.*”

Pursuing God is a mysterious task. God is invisible, inaudible, invincible, and but He is “findable.” The Bible says to “**seek the Lord while he may be found**” (Isaiah 55:6). “***You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.***” (Jer 29:13 NIV).

Col.3:1-3 says, “**If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.**”

We must see the reality—Jesus is the King. We must set the priority—Seek first His Kingdom. And third we must:

3. SUBMIT TO HIS AUTHORITY:

The Scripture is clear that our pursuit is not for just any kingdom; we seek God’s kingdom. We are called to pursue and submit to the reign and rule of almighty God. Perhaps, one reason God seems distant and the worries of life seem dominant is our reluctance to submit to His authority. The Bible says “***God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.***” (1 Pet. 5:5-6). Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd, but He is also the reigning King of Kings.

William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, was asked about the secret of his success and the impact that the Salvation Army was having upon the world. Booth paused and spoke with tearful eyes, “*I will tell you the secret. God has all of me there is of me. There have been men with better brains, greater talents, and greater opportunities. But, from the day I got a vision for what Jesus could do with the poor of London, I made up my mind that God would have all of William Booth there was.*” (Frank Cox, Take Your Burdens To the Lord, pastorlife.org) General Booth knew the Salvation Army had only one commander and chief whose rank and power surpasses all of our futile attempts to govern our own lives. WE must understand this: God is not interested in building your kingdom, but He is extremely committed to meeting your needs that empower you to build His kingdom.

Are you building His kingdom? Or are you building your own? How can you tell? Here are two really good indicators: your watch and your wallet. How do you spend your time and how do you spend your money?

We must submit to the King's authority, and last we must:

4. STRIVE FOR "HIS" PURITY:

We must recognize the reign of God is not only powerful, but it is also pure, holy, and righteous. Notice Jesus is not suggesting to seek personal righteousness. Other passages certainly promote striving for personal purity, but Matthew 6:33 calls us to seek "**His righteousness**." The emphasis is not on getting yourself cleaned up before seeking God; rather Jesus declares that God is righteous. We don't get God by being righteous, we get righteous by knowing God.

My family has taken a lot of road trips. While traveling, like everyone else we make our share of stops for gas and potty breaks. Why is it that children seem unable to make the connection that consuming massive amounts of liquids causes one to need to go to the bathroom? If your children are like mine were they probably think raiding the candy aisle at a gas station ranks second only to Disney World in family fun. While you may satisfy your desire for candy at a gas station, your choices for substantial nutrition is fairly limited. To find nutritional meals, you must seek another place that offers something other than Snickers, Skittles, and Sour Worms.

God's provision is not found at convenience stores offering items for temporary pleasure. The Bible says in James 4:3, "**You ask and don't receive because you ask wrongly, so that you may spend it on your desires for pleasure.**" This world has a lot to offer, but it does not provide what we need. Matthew 6:33 is not a "name it and claim it" promise for God to give you anything you desire. What you seek may not be found on the shelves of God's storehouse. God promises to meet legitimate needs of those who seek Him and His righteousness. The apostle Paul described God's provision as coming from the reservoir of "**His riches in glory**" (Php. 4:19).

Am I seeking the things that come from His riches in glory? Will the things I seek bring glory to God or just bring more pleasure to me?

CONCLUSION

"We'll be out until 10:30," said Chad's parents as their friends, the Petersons, came by to pick them up for banquet. "While we're gone, stay home and finish your history paper."

"Can't I use the car for just a little while?" asked Chad. He had gotten his driver's license just last month. "Um, I need to borrow a book from Todd. I'll only be gone a while."

"Absolutely not," warned Chad's father. "You have all the books you need for tonight. You stay home and work on that paper."

Darn. Chad really wanted to get together with his friends while his parents were gone. After all, his parents weren't using the car, so why shouldn't he be able to? It didn't seem fair. He only wanted to be out for an hour or so. There would still be time to work on his history paper, he reasoned.

The phone rang. It was Todd. "Hey, come on over," he said. "All the guys are here."

Chad decided that he could go to Todd's and get back early enough so that his parents would never know. He just had to be sure to put some gas in the car so nothing would look suspicious. He could work fast on his history paper when he returned.

He got in the car and took off. No one would ever be the wiser, he thought. On the way to Todd's, however, disaster struck. He had a flat tire. Oh great, he thought. He had never changed a tire before. Now he was going to have to not only change a tire, but also get it repaired quickly so that his parents would never find out. He needed to hurry.

He got out the tire jack and the wrench and went to work. But somehow all of the lug nuts on the wheel were stuck. He couldn't get the tire off. He turned the wrench as hard as he could, but to no avail. After what seemed like hours of trying to get the nuts off, he finally gave up and walked to the nearest gas station. He was exhausted.

It was after ten o'clock when the gas station attendant finally put the pneumatic wrench on the lug nuts and removed the tire. Chad couldn't believe it. Why couldn't he get those nuts off? Why were they on there so tight? Life wasn't fair! Now he was going to be put on restriction for the rest of his life!

"Which way were you turning them?" asked the gas station attendant. Chad thought it was a stupid question. Of course he knew how to unscrew a nut. You turn it counterclockwise. "Well," said the attendant, "the threads on this side of the car are reversed. To get them off, you turn them clockwise."

Suddenly Chad felt like a fool.

- A lot of people in the world today have a difficult time finding happiness and fulfillment in life because they are going about it in the wrong way.
- They are like Chad, turning the nut in the wrong direction—it only gets tighter. Life doesn't get better; it gets worse.
- The life that Jesus teaches us to live is like a reverse thread—it's just the opposite of what people think.
- The world says, "Do everything for yourself" The Bible says, "**whatever you do, do everything for God's glory.**"

God made an incredible promise to care for us with greater concern than the flowers and the birds, but He also instructed where and how to find His provision.

"But, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be provided for you."

"God is ready to assume full responsibility for the life wholly yielded to Him."--
Andrew Murray.

Illustration: Bruce Larson tells how he helped people struggling to surrender their lives to Christ:

For many years I worked in New York City and counseled at my office any number of people who were wrestling with this yes-or-no decision. Often I would suggest they walk with me from my office down to the RCA Building on Fifth Avenue. In the entrance of that building is a gigantic statue of Atlas, a beautifully proportioned man who, with all his muscles straining, is holding the world upon his shoulders. There he is, the most powerfully built man in the world, and he can barely stand up under this burden. 'Now that's one way to live,' I would point out to my companion, 'trying to carry the world on your shoulders. But now come across the street with me.'

"On the other side of Fifth Avenue is Saint Patrick's Cathedral, and there behind the high altar is a little shrine of the boy Jesus, perhaps eight or nine years old, and with no effort he is holding the world in one hand. My point was illustrated graphically.

"We have a choice. We can carry the world on our shoulders, or we can say, 'I give up, Lord; here's my life. I give you my world, the whole world.'"