BUT SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

Matthew 6:19–34

Key Verse: 6:33

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

 In this Sermon, Jesus has been teaching us about the hypocrisy of living for one’s own glory. In 6:1–18 he talked about giving to the needy, praying, and fasting. Many were doing these things for others to see. But Jesus says to do them in secret, only for God to see. To cure us of secretly living for our own glory Jesus repeatedly mentions our Father in heaven. God is our heavenly Father who truly cares for us. He sees what we do in secret, to please him. And he’ll reward us, if the things we do are truly for him. To cure us of living for our own glory Jesus also teaches us to always begin our prayers by saying, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (9,10). It’s to help us change from being focused on ourselves to being focused on God, his kingdom, his will, and to be useful to him, to bring honor and glory to his name in our day-to-day lives.

 Now in 6:19–34 Jesus challenges us about money. Honestly speaking, like it or not, money is a big part of the reality of life. Poor people worry about money and chase after it in a meaningless struggle to survive. Rich people also worry about money and hoard it in a meaningless struggle for their own glory. Jesus calls us not to give our hearts to money or to worries, but to following him. His simple, powerful words in this passage show us how we can truly live like this. May God open our hearts and speak to us personally through his words today.

 Read verses 19–21. Jesus says our lives can focus on only one of two directions: storing up treasures on earth, or storing up treasures in heaven. It should be obvious which path to take. Treasures on earth never last. They get ruined by decay, or stolen by others. It’s foolish to spend a life on perishable things. Only treasures in heaven last forever. Even though we may know this, we still like treasures on earth better. Why? Because they’re tangible, and we can enjoy them now. Jesus is asking us to stop and take a long-range perspective on life. To what should we be giving our hearts? Read verse 21 again. As we’ve seen again and again in this Sermon, Jesus is constantly focusing on our hearts. He doesn’t want us to just keep God’s laws outwardly, but from our hearts. He doesn’t want us to just do acts of piety outwardly, but from our hearts. He doesn’t want us to just follow him outwardly, but from our hearts. People can’t see it, but what we have in our hearts is so important. Why? Because it sets our life direction. If we secretly treasure things in this world, our lives will go towards the world. If we secretly treasure God and his kingdom, our lives will go towards him. The real question is: how can we get our hearts, which are so easily engrossed in this world, into heavenly treasure? Jesus said we need to start storing our treasures there. To get started, we need faith. It’s also a process. At first, treasure in heaven sounds way far off, unrealistic. But as we start doing good things only for God to see, we’re storing up treasures in heaven, and the hope of heaven gradually becomes more and more real to us.

 Read verses 22,23. Here Jesus contrasts healthy and unhealthy eyes. “Healthy” means “generous,” and “unhealthy” means “stingy.” Unhealthy eyes are obsessed with earthly treasures. The more we look at them, the more our hearts are captured, and the greedier we become. We start thinking of things that are luxuries as if we desperately need them. We need to turn our eyes to God and his kingdom. Colossians 3:2 says, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Our eyes are connected to our mind and heart. As we look to God and his coming kingdom, our hearts are enlightened; our “whole body is full of light.” We see the world from God’s point of view. We’re free from fear, which makes us dark. We have the courage to live generously. In contrast, Jesus is warning us not to let greed capture our hearts and plunge us into such darkness that we start making foolish life choices.

 Read verse 24. Here Jesus is using extreme rhetoric of black and white to help us look at ourselves honestly. Who are we serving, really? Are we serving God and his kingdom? Or is our priority on making money? Many people think, “I’m not serving money; I’m just living my life.” But if our daily priorities are on our own career, our own financial security, we may be going to church and talking about God, but our heart belongs to money. Practically, how much time and energy do we spend on our jobs or studies? On maintaining our lives? How much of our money is spent on ourselves? How much time and energy do we set aside for pursuing and serving God and spreading his kingdom? How much of our money? Jesus isn’t asking us all to live like monks. We can follow Jesus and still be busy in this world. But where’s our *hearts*, really? What’s our *priority*, really? There are many Christians very successful in business but whose life passion is Christ and his kingdom. They pray every day to use their endeavors for Christ and his kingdom. Jesus is asking a simple question today: what’s got our real priority? Whatever it is, that’s our master. Is it God?

Read verse 25. For some people, if the pursuit of money is taken away, they don’t know what to do with themselves. Without money, they feel naked, exposed, and worries flood into their hearts. They ask, “But what am I going to *do*? How am I going to *live*?” Jesus knew his disciples had left everything to follow him. They made Jesus their life priority. So now, they had no financial security, no obvious means of where their basic life necessities would be coming from. The disciples weren’t *saying* anything, but Jesus could just *feel* the worries in their hearts. Following Jesus from the heart, as top priority, is a hard direction to keep in our practical lives.

So, in this next section Jesus again points his disciples and us to our heavenly Father. He gives some vivid examples from nature. Read verse 26. Birds may not seem like the greatest life example for us, but Jesus says in one aspect, they are. Birds don’t worry about their survival; in fact, they’re not doing anything about their future. They just live one day at a time. But God always provides just enough food for them to survive happily. Have you ever noticed? Birds don’t have much, but they’re always singing. Jesus says we’re way more valuable to God than birds. So why wouldn’t God take care of us, too?

 Read verse 27. Here Jesus shows us how unhealthy and unproductive worrying is. It doesn’t add even a single hour to our lives. In fact, worrying probably shortens our lifespan. Yet people worry chronically, out of habit. We all have things we’re worrying about. Some worry about their major or their grades. Some worry about what others think of them, what they look like, or how to impress. Some worry about finding a life partner. Some worry about their children or grandchildren. Some worry about their parents. When we worry, we can’t sleep well; we age prematurely. Worries give us ulcers. We worry about things we don’t have any control over and aren’t even sure will happen. Worries hinder us from doing the good we *could* be doing.

 Sensing they’re still not convinced, Jesus gives another illustration. Read verses 28–30. God clothes the flowers and grass of the fields with such splendorous beauty, without them even trying! How nice to be beautiful without even trying! What’s the point here? It’s not to be dressed in splendor, but to be taken care of by God our Father. Jesus is saying that if we rely on God our Father and give our best to serve him, he’ll surely clothe us, because he considers us way more valuable than perishable plants. Jesus also puts his finger on the root of all our worries: “you of little faith.” When our faith is too tiny, we worry. Jesus wants our faith to grow until it’s centered in God our Father, who’s living, who still provides and cares for all those who trust in him.

 Read verses 31–33. Jesus wants us to live differently than people who don’t believe in God. What’s the difference? Instead of running after what to eat, drink or wear like everybody else, he wants us to seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness. But what does it mean? First, it means to take it *seriously*, to put our *hope* in it—basically, to believe it’s *real*. Only if we believe it’s *real* will we *seek* it. But we don’t *see* his kingdom or his righteousness, so how can we *believe* it? As we’ve seen earlier in Matthew, both John and Jesus preached the same thing: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (3:2; 4:7). To seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, we need to repent. The word “repent” in Greek literally means to change our minds. About what? About our sins, about the world, and about God. When we repent, sin and the things of this world are no longer what we desire or long for; now we want God.

In verse 33 the word “seek” is important. In Greek, it means to desire something and strive for it. We should *desire* and *strive for* God’s kingdom and his righteousness. Jesus said earlier, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (5:6). It means to keep hungering and thirsting for a personal relationship with God. It means to long for the hope of his kingdom, to long to see Jesus in person someday. At the end of his life of striving, Apostle Paul said, “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2Ti4:8). “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” challenges our worldliness and spiritual apathy. It inspires us to keep striving to know God deeper, especially through spending quality time in Bible study and prayer. Many people claim to be too busy. But honestly, what we desire, we make time for.

Yet it’s also about more than our own personal salvation. To seek *first* his kingdom is to want to see his kingdom *grow* in this world. It’s why Jesus taught us to pray first, “…your kingdom come” (10a) It doesn’t mean to just pray for the end of the world to come soon, but to pray that more and more people would believe in Jesus and become members of his kingdom. To seek it first is not just to pray for it, but also to be engaged in telling others about it. Later Jesus predicts, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (24:14). The Apostle Paul, who’s maybe the best example of a real Christian, spent his life going around proclaiming this kingdom (Ac20:35). We all need to be actively and prayerfully inviting people to this kingdom. It means telling people about God our Father, who loves us, and who, by his amazing grace, is inviting us all back to him. In verse 33 the word “first” is key. It tells us it needs to be our priority.

 Jesus gives a precious promise to those who live by this: “…and all these things will be given to you as well.” When we seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness, God blesses us with all that we need, financially, emotionally and spiritually. It’s not a theory; it’s a promise of God that we need to hold onto and put into practice, in our daily priorities and decisions. Read verse 34. The daily troubles don’t prevent us from seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness. Jesus is saying to live day by day depending on God. What a beautiful life!

Read verse 33 again. May God help us accept this verse newly and practice it.