**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**How Do We Know What Our Priorities Are?**

Jesus Christ wants us to put Him and His kingdom FIRST in our lives. Jesus said, *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”* (Matt. 6:33) Jesus said in Matthew 10:37-39 that if we love father or mother, or son or daughter more than we love Him, we are not worthy of Him. In Luke 14:33 He said “whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.” In order to be a disciple of Christ we must forsake all for Him, even our own lives.

What is most important to you? What are your priorities in life? Being honest in our answer to these questions is not easy. The temptation for us as Christians is to answer in terms of what we know SHOULD BE most important, and not what is in fact most important to us. For example we may say, “The Lord and His kingdom is most important to me,” because we know that is what we ought to say, and if we say it enough, we may convince ourselves that that is the truth, when in actuality it is not the truth.

Also if we think we are moving more or less in the direction of putting Jesus first, we may think that gives us the right to say that the things of Jesus Christ are our top priorities. We may say it like this, “I plan to pray and study my Bible more, I plan to attend services more regular just as soon as I can get my schedule under control.” Since our intentions are good, we think our priorities are where they ought to be and the Lord is pleased.

The lesson today is designed to test what truly is important to us. We want to answer the question, “How do we know what our priorities are?”

First of all, our priorities are determined by our PRACTICE, not by our words or our theories. In Matthew 19:16-22 we read of a rich, young man coming to Jesus and asking Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” Jesus tells him, “if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” The young man asked, “Which ones?” Jesus said, “‘You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'” (vs. 18-19) “The young man said to Him, ‘All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’” It then says that the young man “went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”

Now I think this man truly wanted eternal life. If you asked him what his top priorities are, he would have probably said pleasing God is his highest priority. But when Jesus told him “go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’” he went away because he had great possessions. What this young man may have said about his values indicated one thing, but his ACTIONS indicated another. Again, our priorities are determined by our PRACTICE, not by our words or our intentions.

We need to understand, the Lord does not judge what our priorities are by listening to our theories, but by looking at our DEEDS. James says in James 2:18, “But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” Now, who has faith? Is it the one who says he has faith, or is it the one who shows his faith by his WORKS?

Look with me also in Matthew 7:21. Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” Who will enter the kingdom of heaven? Is it the one who says “Lord, Lord,” or is it the one who DOES the will of the Father in heaven?

How do we know what our priorities are? By looking at what we are in fact DOING with our lives. If we do not somehow gather our courage and look at ourselves as God does concerning what is most important to us as to actual fact (that is by what we DO), and if we don’t repent accordingly, eternity holds no hope for us. Jesus said, “he who does the will of My Father in heaven,” is the one who will enter the kingdom of heaven.

In order for us to see ourselves as God sees us, we need to ask ourselves some blunt questions as to what our priorities are.

Question #1 What do others say our priorities are? Others may not know us as well as we know ourselves, but they are often more objective about what they do know. Perhaps more than anyone our children and our spouses are able to cut through our words and tell us what actually matters most to us in the rough and tumble of daily living. They see what we are actually doing. If we want to know what our priorities are they could probably sum up in a word or two what we are all about. We ought to ask them. Ask them to help you in your honest quest as to what your true priorities are. What they tell us may hurt. It may be what we don’t want to hear. But if we are honestly wanting to see ourselves as God sees us concerning our priorities, then asking them to give us their honest evaluation of what they see, can be very helpful. The writer of Proverbs says, “Open rebuke is better Than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” (Prov. 27:5-6).

Question #2 What do we think about? Our true priorities are the things we choose to think about when our minds are in neutral. When activities and obligations do not require us to be thinking about anything in particular our thoughts usually are attracted like filings to a magnet to our real interests. We will think about those things that are most important to us. And so the person who finds that he meditates on God and His word only when he forces himself to do so on Sunday in church services, is not telling the truth when he says that the things of God are his overriding concern. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.” (Matt. 5:6). We know what it means to hunger and thirst for something. Will those who hunger and thirst for righteousness think on the righteousness of God only when they force themselves to do so on Sunday? Who is the one who truly loves the Lord and puts Him first in his life? The Psalmist said, “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.” (Psalm 119:97).

Question #3 What do we talk about? The conversations we engage in arise out of the things that are on our minds. We usually talk about those things in which we are interested. If we have to admit that we rarely talk about the Lord except in connection with the services of the church, that ought to tell us something. And even if we do sometimes talk about the things of God, if our acquaintances would have to say that our conversation gravitates more naturally and enthusiastically toward other things, then there is serious doubt whether our ultimate priorities are really the kingdom of God. What we choose to talk about speaks loudly regarding our values.

Question #4 How do we spend our time? Hardly anyone has as much spare time as he would like. But all of us have some and the way we spend it displays our priorities. For example, What would you say of someone who says that he does not have time to study his Bible, or to do personal evangelism, but he finds time to go fishing, or to go to a football game, or to watch TV every night? People usually find time to do what they want to do. They find time to do what is important to them. Someone might be saying, “but I have to admit I don’t enjoy reading, and so it is hard for me to read my Bible. I don’t enjoy talking to others about Jesus because most people reject it and won’t have anything to do with me. I don’t enjoy that.” I understand. Doing the will of the Lord is not always enjoyable. I’m sure Jesus did not enjoy going to the cross. But He did it because our salvation was important to Him. We do what is important many times even when we do not enjoy it. Here is a mother whose child gets sick in the middle of the night. The child is vomiting. I’m sure the mother would rather stay asleep than to get up and tend to the sick child. But she gets up and does what she does not enjoy doing because the care of that child whom she loves is important to her. That child is a priority in her life. We take the time to serve the Lord because He is important to us.

Question#5 How do we spend our money? How we spend our money says a lot about what our priorities are. Suppose a Bible class teacher recommended a $35.00 reference book that would help us in our Bible study, but we said we could not afford it. Suppose a preacher recommended a $25.00 a year magazine that would help us grow spiritually, but we said it cost too much. But suppose at the same time, we spend that much and more attending one baseball game, or we spend that much eating out every week, or we spend that much and more on decorative home furnishings. Could anyone then take seriously our claim that the Lord is our uppermost concern?

Question #6 What gives when we face a conflict of priorities? Be assured, conflicts will arise that will test what is most important to us. For example, sometimes we face scheduling conflicts. This is where we are unable to be at two places at the same time, and so we will have to give up one activity for another. When this happens, if we give up doing the work of the Lord for worldly activities, then we show where our priorities really are. In the matter of sports, if we can manage it such that our softball league and the services of the Lord’s church hardly ever conflict, that is all well and good, but it says relatively little about our priorities. It is when the occasional conflict arises that we make a statement about our priorities. Do we play ball or do we worship God with our fellow saints? Indeed, it is when priorities collide that we learn the most about ourselves, our values, and whether the Lord reigns within us or not.

How do I know in all honesty what my priorities are? It is by looking at what I am in fact doing with my life – what I think about, what I talk about, how I spend my time, how I spend my money, and what gives when conflicts arise. Where my priorities are, there will my energy and enthusiasm be also.

Our time is gone for today. If you have a question for our program, or if you would like to talk with us there are three ways you may contact us. You may send us an email. Our email address is sjchurch@sjchurchofchrist.com. You may call us. Our telephone number is 573-265-8628. Or you may send us a note by means of the US Postal service. Our mailing address is Bible Talk, P.O. Box 308, St. James, MO 65559.