

God First

Prayer

Let me ask a tough question this morning... Where does God fit in your priorities? For a lot of people church is a great thing. It is something that they add into their lives. It creates fullness. They believe in the principles but... Jesus is not their priority.

I remember my daughters at sports day. All decked out in their gym strip, new runners, all eager and excited. There was a goal, to win the race. I remember doing martial arts competitions. There was a goal in mind a target and I was focused on it. I remember wanting a really cool job, it paid twice what I was making and I was bound and determined to win through the interview process. When I was a kid we had a whitecaps player as our school soccer coach. It was really cool! Except when we were running around the field he had a tendency to run backwards in front of us and forcefully exhale through his nose. Being in the front lost some of its allure during training, but I digress.

I remember Thomas Edison the inventor of the light bulb who never gave up his quest. When asked about his failures, he said, "I have not failed, I've found 10,000 ways that won't work." He was consumed with a passion. He spent long hours and endured setback after setback, but his vision was set on a goal.

This morning I ask you all what is your primary goal today?

Well, I read what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 NLT "*Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.*"

Is that what you are seeking first this morning?

Let's look honestly at ourselves this morning... What are we putting first in our lives?

Here are three things that I have often observed that we as human beings tend to put first:

- Job or Career
 - Now Jobs, career and so on are important. In fact, the bible says that the man who doesn't care for his family is worse than an infidel.
 - Jobs can be a light to the world. An employer, co-workers or staff should be able to see the light of Christ in you.
 - Working hard is good. The bible tells us to be no slothful or lazy in business.
 - But folks, your job or career should never be first in your life.

- Money
 - Money is a useful financial instrument
 - Many people spend most of their energy accumulating more of it
 - Money can open many doors and be used for many good purposes
 - What you have is God's you are his steward, so many forget this perspective
 - Money may be a distraction from the value of people and many sacrifice people for it

- Leisure and Pleasure
 - How many people don't come to church on Sunday?
 - How many times have you heard: "Sunday is my day off, I need to relax"
 - Pleasure and down time keeps us balanced. It can help us to not become fatigued or burned out.
 - Leisure time with the family is healthy, and important, but should not be all that you focus on.
 - Pleasure is good, but it should not be our primary purpose in life.
 - Pleasure and Leisure should not come before God.
 - Pleasure and Leisure are great but we must not forget that Jesus said: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."
 - Here is a hard one... but it makes a valid point.
 - I knew a mother who was greatly upset about her family. When she came to church she would complain and fret over the salvation of her kids and the fact that they weren't attending church, yet when her kids were living at home with her she taught them through example that going to Grandma's house or a family friends place was more important than being in the service on Sunday.
 - I am not talking about exceptions here or occasionally missing service for special events, what I am talking about is when the opportunity came up she regularly prioritized the outings over service to God.
 - Every time I saw her in this state, I grieved for her, because she did not realize that it was her actions, which gave a message to her kids. Now as adults they are responsible for their own decisions, but the pattern was laid.
 - At the time I didn't know how to broach this topic with her, I was not her pastor and she was an acquaintance, so I didn't feel that I had a right to speak into her life and so it continued. My last memories of her are of her suffering over her family not valuing and serving God.

My next point is kind of self-evident. We need to Seek First the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, but what does that mean? We see it in the scripture and we think we know what it means, but let's be sure and put some meat around this...

When we put God first in our lives it means that we change to his way of thinking.

In Romans 12:2 CEV the scripture tells us: *"Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him"*

Have you ever heard the expression: "You're trying to fit a square peg into a round hole."

How many of us like our square peg?

How many of us are willing to make our peg a little smaller so that the square peg goes into the round hole even though it doesn't really fit?

How many people like to change?

Nobody that I know... yet we need to be shaped not to conform to this world, but to the kingdom of God.

1) God First -

- We need to put God first in our lives and be willing to change ourselves into what he would have us to be. I want the Holy Spirit to bring about the likeness of Christ in me. But it wasn't always that way. At first I resisted and learned the hard way. Now in obedience I have joy.

2) Serve Him not yourself -

- We learned that we are kings and priests, a royal priesthood and a holy nation unto God. 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 NKJV says: *"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*
- Ambassadors serve their kingdoms do they not?
- Will you be a good ambassador and represent the message of your King accurately and faithfully or will you be a poor ambassador and represent him when it benefits you or fits into your self-interests?

3) Serve the Church -

- The church was instituted to train and equip people to carry the good news of Jesus Christ to the people.

- Jesus left his church down here to pick-up and carry on his work in the earth.
- Jesus commanded us to attend, fellowship and encourage each other.
 - Hebrews 10:24-25 says: *“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”*
- We are commanded to pray for each other. James 5:16 NKJV: *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*
- Your commission is to learn and then make disciples for Jesus

So God has said that he will bless you when you put him and his kingdom first. How many want to be blessed by God here this morning? Remember what we read in Matthew 6:33: *“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.”*

Now I want to talk briefly about the Kingdom of God...

How many people that the terms Kingdom of God and Heaven are synonymous?

Nope... Heaven is a part of it, but it is so much more.

Dr. Ken Hemphill, former president of one of the largest evangelical seminaries in the world had this to say: *“In the kingdom of God, I have found something far superior to personal fulfillment. I have found the heart of God. I have found my reason for being here.”* You see the kingdom of God is here and yet it is still coming. The vastness of the kingdom of God is such that by its very nature it removes all limits on what God can do in us and through us. God doesn't have boundaries. It is beyond our most ardent imaginings. It has limitless resources and power.

We have been talking about the Holy Spirit descending and taking over hearts and stirring fires in us. That is great, but I have a revelation for you this morning, if you want your heart on fire for God, press into what ignites the heart of God.

Why does this kingdom of God thing matter anyway?

Well it mattered to John, Jesus and the Apostles...

Matthew 3:2 – John said: *“...Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*

Matthew 4:17 – Jesus said: *“...“ Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

Matthew 5:3 – It's a gift *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

Matthew 12:28 – Jesus said: “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you”

Matthew 19:24 – Jesus said: “...it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

Luke 10:9-11 Jesus sent out the 70 and said: “...heal the sick there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ‘The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.’

And so on... there is so much material on the kingdom of God I could preach on it for the rest of my career...

So let's clarify the kingdom of God a wee bit more...

We are subjects of our King Jesus. We belong to the kingdom of God. God is the ruler of our lives. The kingdom of God is a coming promise and it is here now in our lives. The kingdom of God is shown through the life and actions of his church. It will be ultimately fulfilled with the second coming of Jesus.

The kingdom of God is shown in our obedience to the will and Word of God individually and corporately as a church. It manifests itself when we obey his Word and the Holy Spirit is released.

The kingdom of God is not constrained by time, or geography.

The kingdom of God is not constrained politically, economically, culturally, socially or in fact in any way.

We are the tools that he uses to extend his kingdom. That is why we are here to serve him.

The kingdom shows the power of God. It is the place where his presence is felt. It is the place where his will is done.

People have such a hard time with the kingdom principle because everyone wants to be king... ME first!

People have a real hard time with the concept that Jesus is their Lord and King and he is their master. Jesus adopts us as sons and daughters and makes us a royal priesthood, yet we as a race have a hard time putting our will second and his first.

You see it really comes down to this... When we put God first in our lives, we realize that he has created a kingdom for us. It is an unlimited kingdom full of promise. God has made it a gift to us in that It is a place wherein our lives can be full of hope

and find meaning. Out of that love and understanding we spread the Good news to others about Jesus Christ.

I am delighted when people come to Jesus and accept the sacrifice of his blood and his salvation, yet I am grieved when they stop there in their relationship with him. If you will forgive the analogy; it's a bit like getting a priority all access pass to Disney land but spending the day sitting on the bench by the gate.

Now, no one should be selling you this is easy for the kingdom requires commitment and is costly. We are told this in Matthew 13:44,45

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

The Kingdom of God will cost you dearly... It will cost you obedience to God and putting him and his kingdom first in your life. The rewards are so great! But the road to life is narrow and few are those who find it. John the Baptist got it right in John 3:30 when he says: “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

You are given everything... You are a child of the King, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and ambassador for Christ. When you put him first you receive all his goodness... Will you put Jesus first in your life today?

Prayer