

INTRODUCTION

Today I would like to look for a few brief minutes, at **Matthew 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

A great verse – one to base your life on! I have looked at a number of commentaries and website comments on this verse and the most common interpretation is that life is filled with **wasteful worries, inevitable challenges** and **unavoidable anxieties** - they are all a fact of life – and the antidote to these perennial problems is to seek first the KOG.... This verse is seen as a **cure for concern, an alternative to apprehension, a treatment for trepidation.**

But I want to say that this view is completely the wrong way round. Jesus is not saying that life is terrible, that there are inevitable snares that will trip you up and dog your steps. Jesus is clearly setting out the major principles of success for his disciples! These are principles of success, ways to make your Christian life effective, how you can best be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. This is not what might be called ‘back foot’ Christianity’ which is defensive and defeated. It is ‘front-foot Christianity’ like ‘How to be winners for Jesus, overcomers and life-changers.

Consider the context. Look in chapter 5: he shares how the ‘Beautiful Attitudes.’ These people are blessed by God. The humble, the meek, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers. Get these on your agenda. 5:13 you are the salt of the earth, 14 the light of the world. This is like Jesus giving a motivational talk to his champions, his team of world-changers – not him offering medication or therapy to the wounded in the hospital of life, or him suggesting some help to the remedial group of the class.

It’s the same in ch. 6. Look at the headings – Giving to the needy (generosity), prayer, fasting, putting treasure in heaven. And in this passage 25-34 he is contrasting the old way, the non-Christian way (see v 32) to the way his disciples are to live – not in worry, not in fear but confidently pursuing the Kingdom of God and his righteousness – because if you do that God will make sure everything else is fine – ‘and all these things will be given to you as well.’

It’s like Jesus saying, ‘Hey, guys, this is what you have to do, these are your responsibilities and these are Gods. If you take care of these things God will take care of these other issues!’ See first the Kingdom.

The following story is from a letter that Neil Anderson received from a person he had helped in his counselling ministry.

‘While on vacation as a child one year, I happened upon a gold watch that was lying facedown in the parking lot of our motel. It was covered with dirt and gravel. At first glance, it did not seem worth the effort to bend down and pick it up, but for some reason I found myself reaching for it anyway.

The crystal was broken, the watchband was gone, and there was moisture on the dial. From all appearances, there was no logical reason to believe this watch would still work. Every indication was that its next stop would be the trash can.

Those in my family who were with me at the time laughed at me for picking it up. My mother even scolded me for holding such a dirty object that was so obviously destroyed. As I reached for the winding stem, my brother made a comment about my lack of intelligence. "It's been run over by cars," he chided. "Nothing can endure that kind of treatment!"

As I turned the stem, the second hand of the watch began to move. My family was wrong. Truly, odds were against the watch working, but there was one thing no one thought of. No matter how broken the outside was, if the inside was not damaged, it would still run, and indeed it did keep perfect time. This watch was made to keep time. It’s outside appearance had nothing to do with the purpose for which it was designed. Although the appearance was damaged, the inside was untouched and in perfect condition.

Twenty-five years later, I still have the watch. I take it out every once in a while and wind it up, and it still works. I think as long as the inside remains untouched, it always will. However, unless I had bothered to pick it up and try to wind it years ago, I never would have known the part that really mattered was still in perfect condition. Although it looks like a piece of junk, it will always be a treasure to me, because I looked beyond the outside appearance and believed in what really mattered, it's ability to function in the manner for which it was created.

Thank you, Neil and Joanne, for making the effort to "pick up the watch," and "turn the stem." You are helping me to see that my emotions may be damaged but my inner self is still in perfect condition, and that is what was created to be with Christ. The only permanent part. The part that really mattered. I know that deep within my heart, no matter what my feelings are telling me, this is true. I also believe that with the help of God's servants, even the "casing" can be repaired, and maybe even that will become functional again.’ (Neil Anderson and Elmer Towns, Rivers of Revival p59-60)

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus was actually building the inner mechanisms of a successful Christian life and what we have to do every now and again is pick it up, brush it down and turn the winder again to see it work gloriously. Are you willing to do that today – consider the implications!

SO WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

I know that any and every sincere Christian will naturally want to obey this verse because we know that its written into our DNA as believers. But what does it mean?

Let's firstly begin with this word 'seek.' Clearly it means more than having a casual look around, a mere brief glance. It rather has to do with a conscious intentional, deliberate pro-activeness. It has to do with an intensity of searching out. You remember the word is used of Jesus seeking us.

Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." That's serious! It was costly, sacrificial, it took effort and commitment! We see it again in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin in Lk 15. So we're talking about a diligent, even passionate zeal for something.

Then look at the next word 'first.' Here we are talking something that should be before all other things, the top priority, the foremost, No. 1 passion of our lives.

To be zealous for His kingdom would probably be a good interpretation of the meaning here.

George Macdonald said, 'A disciple can be forgiven if he does not have great mental ability. He can be forgiven also if he does not display outstanding physical prowess. But no disciple can be excused if he does not have zeal. If his heart is not aflame with a red-hot passion for the Saviour, he stands condemned. "After all, Christians are followers of the One who said, 'The zeal of your house hath eaten me up' (John 2:17). Their Saviour was consumed with a passion for God and for His interests. There is no room in His train for half-hearted followers." Another asked: "As a follower of Christ, do you feel an intense zeal in your soul for the things of God? Do you feel excited about God? About His work? About His people? About His Word? Does zeal for His house consume you?" Challenging questions!

Then there's the issue of the King himself.

Look at the next word. Seek first **his** kingdom. It's impossible to divorce him from his Kingdom. Jesus Christ is the King. Indeed he is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. There is no power or person greater than him. There is none who has any attribute that exceeds or outshines his beauty or perfection. Moses says **Ex 15:11** Who is like you — majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? David calls him the King of glory and the hymn writers call him the King of love.

The King of Love my Shepherd is, Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his, And he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow, My ransomed soul he leadeth,
And, where the verdant pastures grow, With food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed, But yet in love he sought me,
And on his shoulder gently laid, And home, rejoicing, bought me.

Stewart Townend wrote a modern song:

The King of love is my delight. His eyes are fire, His face is light
The First and Last, the Living One. His name is Jesus
And from His mouth there comes a sound
That shakes the earth splits the ground
And yet this voice is life to me. The voice of Jesus

And I will sing my songs of love, calling out across the earth the
King has come, the King of love has come
And troubled minds can know His peace, captive hearts can be released
The King has come, the King of love has come

My lovers breath is sweetest wine. I am His prize and He is mine
How can a sinner know such joy? Because of Jesus
The wounds of love are in His hands. The price is paid for sinful man
Accepted child, forgiven son because of Jesus

And my desire is to have You near, Lord you know that you are welcome here
Before such love, before such grace, I will let the walls come down

Isn't Jesus wonderful?! I just love C. S. Lewis' depiction of Jesus as the Lion King. He is at once mighty and frightening but on the other so benevolent and caring and protecting – just like Jesus

In the prayer meeting on Thursday morning matt read to us the first part of David's Ps 45

My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king; my tongue is the pen of a skilful writer. 'You are the most excellent of men and your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever. Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one; clothe yourself with splendour and majesty. In your majesty ride forth victoriously on behalf of truth, humility and righteousness; let your right hand display awesome deeds.

Then he goes on to address the daughter who is the Bride of the king:

Ps 45:10 Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear: Forget your people and your father's house. The king is enthralled by your beauty; honour him, for he is your Lord.13 All glorious is the princess within [her chamber]; her gown is interwoven with gold. In embroidered garments she is led to the king; her virgin companions follow her and are brought to you. 15 They are led in with joy and gladness; they enter the palace of the king.

Here is how it should be. Intimacy and closeness. Beholding the beauty of the Lord, this is life eternal....This is what it is all about. Before ever we get to the Power of the Kingdom we must get into a passion for the King. The alternative is not a hot option!

I recently read a most tragic story about a guy called Charles Templeton. There was a time when Charles Templeton was one of the most popular evangelists in the USA. He was close friend of Billy Graham—they were, at times, preaching team-mates. During the 1950s and '60s, Templeton preached to crowds of 10,000 to 30,000 nightly. He packed stadiums and thrilled audiences with his proclamation of "the gospel of Christ," as he believed it to be—from his misguided denominational vantage point.

But something went all wrong for him. He started questioning the reliability of the Bible, it's account of creation and the Biblical teaching of hell. He progressively developed a hardened heart. He became totally hypocritical. Finally, he could bear it no longer. To use his own words, he bade "farewell to God."

In 1996, Charles Templeton published his book, the title of which expresses the sentiment just stated. "**Farewell to God**" – **My reasons for rejecting the Christian faith** Rather, this work provides a footnote on this terribly sad story.

Lee Strobel who studied law at Yale and was the former legal editor for the **Chicago Tribune** was researching his latest book, **The Case For Faith** in 2000, and sought out and was granted an interview with Templeton, then 80 years old, in his penthouse apartment on the 25th floor of a high rise in Toronto, Canada.

During the course of their conversation, Templeton vigorously rejected the notion of God and the Bible. He was unchanged. Then, Strobel directed the old gentleman's attention to Christ. Strobel says that, amazingly, Templeton's "body language softened." His voice took on a "melancholy and reflective tone." And then, incredibly, he said:

"He was the greatest human being who has ever lived. He was a moral genius. His ethical sense was unique. He was the intrinsically wisest person that I've ever encountered in my life or in my reading. His commitment was total and led to his own death, much to the detriment of the world."

Strobel quietly commented: "You sound like you really care about him." "Well, yes," Templeton acknowledged, "he's the most important thing in my life." He stammered: "I . . . I . . . I adore him . . . Everything good I know, everything decent I know, everything pure I know, I learned from Jesus."

Strobel was stunned. He listened in shock. He says that Templeton's voice began to crack. He then said, "I . . . miss . . . him!" With that the old man burst into tears; with shaking frame, he wept bitterly.

Finally, Templeton gained control of his emotions and wiped away the tears. "Enough of that," he said, as he waved his hand, as if to suggest that there would be no more questions along that line.

Sad, sad indeed!

Lee Strobel said that, despite denying the faith, he sorely missed having a relationship with Jesus.

Let's not make the same mistake friends. Jesus craves our affection. He wants relationship and time.

Lastly there's the issue of His kingdom

We could pack a lot into this section for it is the main aim of the Gospel.

Mark 1:15 The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Mark 12:34"You are not far from the kingdom of God."

Luke 4:43 "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."

Luke 9:2 he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

Luke 10:9 Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'

Luke 11:20 But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you

What is the KOG? Well technically it's **the dynamic rule of God**. God is not a constitutional monarch – just an official figurehead who plays a role of power but actually is led by others behind the scenes. God is King and when he brings his kingdom it is active and powerful. It brings concrete results. When a person becomes converted he enters the KOG. When a Christian gets filled with the HS he is experiencing the KOG. When a person experiences healing he experiences the KOG. When a person gets delivered he is set free by the presence of the KOG. When Christians unite together and are in one heart and mind there you will see manifestations of the Kingdom. When the church calls out to God in 'agreement prayer' God answers dramatically and effectively. When Christians evangelize on the Power of the Holy Spirit and God's presence comes to convict, reveal Christ and cause men and women to repent – there is the KOG.

The KOG is God exercising his benevolent rule and the manifestation of the KOG is usually through the church, through believers, through believers' activities and service together. Expand

While having a break away Liz was reading the story of William and Catherine Booth. Wow, what caliber of man was Booth – but look at what he achieved for God! He established Salvation Army work in 58 countries. He left behind 16,000 officers, hundreds of churches, who preached to millions and eased the burden of 100's of 1,000's of people. When he died 40,000 people attended his funeral and 150,000 filed past his coffin to pay their last respects.

One day she read these words of General Booth, which really set him above his fellows and ensured his success:

For William, following Christ meant having the same purpose as his Savior. Later he would pen these words that captured the very essence of his passion

My comrades, here is our pattern. What are you living for? What is the deep secret purpose that controls and fashions your existence? What do you eat and drink for? What is the end of your marrying and giving in marriage—your money-making and toilings and plannings? Is it the salvation of souls, the overthrow of the kingdom of evil and the setting up of the Kingdom of God? . . . I must push this question. Have you the assurance that the ruling passion of your life is the same as that which brought Christ to the manger, led Him to fight the foul fiend of Hell in the wilderness, bore Him onward on the back of suffering and tears and [dishonor] ignominy and shame, sustained Him in drinking the cup of anguish and enduring the baptism of blood, bore Him through Gethsemane, nailed Him to the Cross of Calvary and enabled Him in triumph to open the gate of the Kingdom? Is this what you are living for? If not, you may be religious—a very proper person amongst religionists—but I don't see how you can be a Christian. What is the value of a shell without a kernel? What is a body without a soul? What is a Christian without a Christ inside? If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His, and the supreme purpose of Christ's spirit was, and still is, and ever will be, to save the world.

He said: While women weep, as they do now, I'll fight; while little children go hungry, as they do now, I'll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight; while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, while there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I'll fight-I'll fight to the very end!

William Booth was a Mt 6:33 man!

So, we say that to practice Mt 6:33 you have to be zealous and enthusiastically pursue a closer relation to Jesus first - and second, to passionately seek God and do what you can in prayer, in ministry of the Spirit, through words and laying on of hands, in contact with unbelievers, so that we see the KOG come with great power in our day and through our service in the church.

Finally there is the issue of His righteousness – but I'll leave that issue for your discussions in the home groups this week!

Are you willing to pick up the watch again, put your hands on the wider, get these things ticking over again and begin being effective for God. Perhaps this talk has helped you do that. Let's stand.

SUGGESTED HOME GROUP QUESTIONS

For week beginning Sunday April 20th 2008

This Sunday we read from Matthew 6:25-34 and particularly looked at Matthew 6:33 **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

Firstly, we considered whether this was merely an antidote to anxiety, a practice that, when applied, helped when life's unavoidable worries and cares were just too much to cope with. On examining the context Tony felt that this was rather a principle that ensured success and victory to every Christian. It is in a long line of positive instructions like the beatitudes (Mt 5:3-1-) being salt and light (Mt 5:13-14) generosity (Mt 6:1-4) prayer (Mt 6:5-15) and laying up treasure in heaven (Mt 6:19-24). The reason it is sandwiched between all the 'worry' talk only serves to contrast and emphasize its importance. Worrying unduly about life's necessities is a pagan occupation – not a Christian one (Mt 6:32) A Christian seeks first the Kingdom and God automatically provided these other things.

All are agreed that 'seeking the kingdom' is a desirable thing – but what does it mean. We took the verse word by word to find out.

Seek – This speaks of a diligent and passionate zeal for something

First – This speaks of having this zeal as the ultimate priority, above all other things

His - It's impossible to divorce the King from his Kingdom. Before we ever get to the Power of the Kingdom we must get into a Passion for the King

Tony here read a very tragic story of a man who neglected to maintain his relationship with Jesus.

Kingdom – this is the dynamic rule of God. It's God bringing his power to bear on human situations to bring help, joy, freedom, salvation, healing and deliverance. We are told to make this our priority. This is done primarily through the church, through purity, prayer, unity, spiritual gifts and proclaiming the gospel. This means that commitment to and participation in the life and ministry of the church is essential.

We did not get round to the last point – 'and his righteousness,' but can discuss that later!

Suggested Discussion Starters

1. Many people responded to this message to recommit their lives to this great purpose. What specifically spoke to you?
2. Regarding the story about Charles Templeton, (which you can read again below) how did the story affect you? What do you think the steps to his downfall were and what should he have done earlier on in his life to avoid such a catastrophic fall?
3. Make comments on the last phrase 'and his righteousness.' What does this mean we have to do?

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intrinsically wisest person that I've ever encountered in my life or in my reading. His commitment was total and led to his own death, much to the detriment of the world."

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