

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 14 September 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God

Matthew 6:25-34

Years ago, when I was a teenager, I remember my pastor, **Butch White**, sharing an experience from early in his married years. At the time, he and his wife, Cheryl, were in Bible College, where they were studying and preparing for the ministry. Pastor had a wife and two small children to support; however, work was nigh impossible to find, because student jobs were scarce. Needless to say, it was a traumatic time in their lives. With no job, he and his wife couldn't even give any tithe to the Lord, because they had zero income to tithe upon. Yet, even though they had no tithe to give, they did give a small offering to their church's Faith Promise missions. Even this commitment (small though it was) was nearly impossible for them to meet; but they always managed to find the money for their Faith Promise by hunting for empty pop bottles on the ground, and trading them in for two cents apiece!

Well, one Tuesday evening, it was time to go to their church, to join other church members in knocking on doors in their town, and sharing the Gospel with people. However, there was only enough petrol for them to get to the church building and back. Furthermore, they had no food in the house. It had been a *really* bad day; and Cheryl was crying. Realising that they needed that petrol to get to school the next day, they decided that they would drive to the church, but then ride with someone else to make the house visits. They were so destitute, that they had actually considered quitting Bible college, and returning to their home state of Ohio, where Pastor was sure to land a secure, good-paying job at General Motors. However, they were determined to obey the Lord that evening, and go out door-knocking.

After they had returned home from door-knocking, they put their little ones to bed, and then got down on their knees, and beseeched the Lord for mercy. While they were praying, there was a knock at the door. The man who had knocked on their door was a custodian at their church named Arnold Hale. Mr. Hale said, "Brother White, I hope I'm not offending you, but Nettie and I try to help a student each semester; and we would like to give you some groceries." It turned out that they had bought them *ten bags and two boxes* of groceries! In addition, Bro. Hale gave them \$10 for petrol money (which, back then, was enough to buy three full tanks of petrol)! Their kids thought that it was Christmas when they awoke the next day, and saw all that food! Pastor White went out to put petrol into their car; and that same day, he received a letter from his dad. This was highly unusual, because his parents were separated, and he didn't have a close relationship with his dad. In fact, this was the only letter that his dad ever wrote to him. Yet, in this one letter that he ever received from his dad, he found enclosed his father's own petrol card, which he had given his son use! And here's the clincher: during all this time, **Pastor and Cheryl had never told anyone about their financial situation**. They simply trusted the Lord to provide for them. Oh, and by the way, on the day after they received the groceries and the petrol card, Pastor found a job!

Was all this just an amazing string of random-chance coincidences? Of course not! Christ promises that when we seek the God's Kingdom *first*, and His righteousness, He *will* provide our needs. This morning, we will study this wonderful promise. This message is entitled ***Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God***.

Read Matthew 6:25-34.

I. The antidote for anxiety (vv. 25-32)

Everyone in this room knows what it's like to be fearful about the future. Because we live in a sin-cursed world, there is much trouble, turmoil, and calamity in life; and even for God's people, hard times are a guarantee. Yet, even in the midst of the uncertainties of life, Jesus *commands* the citizens of His Kingdom to ***“Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.”*** Jesus then asks a powerful question: ***“Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment?”*** Obviously, this is a rhetorical question; but what is the *answer* to that question? We know that life is about more than the bare necessities, such as food, drink, and clothing; yet, what *is* the real meaning of life? A person who doesn't know the Lord might say that life is about finding meaning in hard work, or in achievements, or in family, or in artistic beauty. However, we who are members of God's Kingdom realise that our lives are all about *loving and serving God*. **Philippians 1:21** says, ***“For to me to live is Christ.”***

In a short while, we will examine what it means to live by this truth, ***“For to me to live is Christ.”*** First, though, let's take a hard look at reality. The reality is that we are physical beings, who live in a physical world; and we have physical needs. Things such as food, drink, and clothing are necessary in order for us to *live* in this world. In fact, these things are so important, that, in one sense, these things *are* life! We can't live without them. For example, in **Deuteronomy 24:14-15**, the LORD commanded masters to pay their servants before the end of the day, because that poor servant sets ***“his heart”*** upon those wages. The word for ***“heart”*** is *nephesh*, which is also translated as ***“soul,”*** or ***“life.”*** That poor man has set his *very life* upon those wages, because his life depends upon it. Let's look a similar Scripture.

Read Luke 15:12-13.

As Jesus told this parable of the prodigal son, He used a couple different words to describe the inheritance that the father divided to his son. First, Jesus said that the father divided his *bion*. This word *bion* means “property”; but its primary meaning is ***“life,”*** or ***“living.”*** Also, in **verse 13**, Jesus uses the word *ousia*. This word *ousia* means ***“substance”***; however, this word *ousia* is based on the word *ousa*, which means ***“being,”*** or ***“life.”*** Two times, then, Jesus emphasised that this son wasted his father's *life*. By taking *half* of his father's hard-earned substance, and wasting it, it was as though he destroyed *half his father's life* of work and toil.

What's the point, then? The point is that Jesus is not *minimising* our physical needs. God did create us with physical needs; and therefore, He commands us to be diligent with the things that we have. **Proverbs 27:23** says, ***“Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.”*** In **Proverbs 31**, the LORD praises the virtuous woman, because she ***“is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household...She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.”*** There *is* a certain kind of “thought” that we should give to our earthly needs. For instance, God commands us to ***“Owe no man anything, but to love one another.”*** Staying out of debt requires that you be wise with the money that God has given you. In **1 Timothy 5:8**, Paul says that if a father ***“provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than infidel.”***

Clearly, when Jesus says, **“Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink,”** He is not saying that you should quit your job, loaf around, and expect others to give you a free ride through life. What *is* He saying, then? Well, the Greek behind the statement **“Take no thought for your life”** simply means “do not be anxious.” Jesus is saying, “Don’t fret and worry about your needs.” Yes, you should work hard to provide for yourself and your family; but as you do so, *don’t be fearful* about tomorrow, because God will take care of you. The “thoughts” that Christ is forbidding us to have are *tormenting* thoughts—thoughts of fear and anxiety; thoughts which break our sleep, and destroy our focus; and thoughts which rob us of our joy in the Lord, and of our fellowship with other believers. Christ forbids us to have *unbelieving* thoughts, such as, “Why waste my time praying about my needs? It won’t do any good, anyway, because God never answers me.” Not only does a spirit of fear and unbelief hurt *us*, by causing a breakdown of our health and peace of mind, but it is hurtful to God. It’s an *insult* to Him. God has promised to take care of us; thus, when we are paralysed with worry, we are calling God a liar! It is *natural* for fears to arise in our hearts; but when they do arise, God commands us to cast **“all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”**

Read Philippians 4:4-7.

Christian, when you cast your care upon the Lord, and take your needs to Him in prayer, He gives you *peace*. When you are resting in His care, it *is* possible to **“take no thought for your life.”** You needn’t worry about whether you will live another day; and you needn’t worry about the *comforts* of this life, either. God promises to provide all your needs; and Christ gives us a couple illustrations to show us just how able God is to keep this promise!

First, Christ uses **birds** to illustrate God’s ability to provide **food** for us. Let’s read **verse 26** again. (**Read verse 26 again.**) Have you ever wondered why Christ used the illustration of *birds* here? After all, Christ *could* have used the example of the ant. In **Proverbs 6**, Solomon says, **“Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.”** Ants are a perfect example of diligence, because they *store up* their food for the winter. Yet, Jesus didn’t use the ant as an example. He used the *birds* as an example. Why? Because birds *don’t* store up for the winter! You see, Jesus isn’t talking about the need for *hard work* here. (Even lost people can work hard!) He’s talking about the need for *faith in God’s promises*. Birds *don’t* store up for the winter at all; yet, God provides for them every day. Is Jesus saying that we *shouldn’t* plan for the future, or have any savings? Of course not. He’s simply saying that if God can provide for *birds*, which He designed to live from day to day, will He not provide for *His children*, who are far more valuable to Him than birds?

Now, Jesus also uses the illustration of **lilies**, to show God’s ability to provide **clothing** for us. (**Read verse 28 again.**) Folks, stop and think for a minute of how frail lilies are. They spring up quickly, but then quickly wither and die—or else are trodden down, or mown down, or cast into an oven. So it is with men. In Scripture, God often compares men to grass, or to flowers. In **Psalms 103** David says, **“As for man, his days are as grass: as the flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.”** As mortal men and women, we are like lilies. We quickly spring up, and reach our full bloom of youth; but before we know it, we “wither,” and die. Yet, in our short time on earth, God can provide our clothing. That is the point Jesus is making here. In the *bird* illustration, the birds *toil* for their daily food; but in the lily illustration, the lilies don’t toil at

all (at least, not consciously). God provides them with the sunshine, rain, and nutrients that they need to grow; and they flourish, without making any conscious effort to do so. Furthermore, God clothes the lilies in *style*. Christ points out that even Solomon, who was the richest man of his day, and who clothed his servants lavishly, couldn't possibly outdo the beauty with which God "clothes" a single flower.

What is Jesus saying, then? Is He saying that we should quit our jobs, and abandon our duties? Of course not. God *commands* us to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow. Christ is simply saying that if God can clothe lilies, which don't "work" at all, how much more will He clothe His own children, who are infinitely valuable to Him? And if, because of old age, or chronic ailment, or calamities beyond our control, we are *no longer able* to work to earn our bread, God can still provide our needs. David said, ***"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."*** This promise is especially precious to believers who are going through times of persecution. For 2,000 years now, the citizens of the Kingdom have been waiting for Christ to return to earth to set up His Kingdom; and for the greatest part of that time, believers in most parts of the world have suffered tremendous persecution for their faith in Christ. Yet, even in the times of direst persecution, God provides for His people in strange and unexpected ways. By the way, we haven't seen anything yet. The **Tribulation period** will be the worst time for believers in world history. During the last seven years before Christ returns to earth to set up His Kingdom, believers will not be permitted to buy, sell, or be employed; and they will be hunted down and killed for refusing to take the mark of the Beast. They will be on the run constantly; and there will be no sympathetic Antichrist-followers who will give them food or quarters. Yet, *God* will provide for the believers of the Tribulation period in miraculous ways. Brethren, if God will be able to provide for believers even during the awful Tribulation period, and save a remnant of them alive, cannot He provide for *us*, if we will just *trust* Him?

You see, that is the bottom line—*trust*. Jesus said, ***"Shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith."*** *Faith* is required on our part. By the way, please notice God's graciousness. Christ promises food and clothing to believers, even if their faith be "little"! *How much* faith does it take for God to answer our prayers? Enough to *ask* for God's help, for one thing; and then, enough to *do* whatever God commands us. Faith (even if it be small faith) will always produce godly works, and departure from sin; and when our hearts are cleansed from sin, the Lord can hear our prayers. Even if our faith be *small*, God will honour it!

Christian, is your life filled with care—or with *confidence* in God's faithfulness? Worry doesn't produce one good thing. Let's read **verse 27** again. (**Read verse 27.**) What is Jesus' point in asking the question, ***"Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?"*** We all know that no amount of fretting can add one inch to your height. No matter how badly you want to be taller, it isn't going to happen. What does this have to do with riches, though? Jesus' point is that just as you must be content with the *physical stature* that God has assigned to you, so you must be content with the *riches* that God allows you to have.

Now, maybe you're thinking, "Now, wait a minute, Pastor. I don't understand this comparison between physical height, and wealth. I have no control over what *height* I will be; but I *do* have control over how *wealthy* I will be. If I want to be rich, I can work hard, and make myself rich." My friend, if this be what you think, you are sadly mistaken!

Read Deuteronomy 8:17-18.

You and I may *think* that we can make ourselves rich; but the reality is that it is *God* who gives us the power to accumulate wealth. It is *He* who gives us intelligence, physical strength, and favourable circumstances, so that we *can* work. If God so desire, He can take your health and wealth from you *instantly*. He can take your very *mind* away from you—just as He did to Nebuchadnezzar, when He gave him the mind of a beast for seven years! He can cause calamities to come on you suddenly, so that all your wealth disappears instantly—just as He did to Job. It is *God* who *allows* us to get wealth. And *why* does He allow us to get wealth? **“That he may establish his covenant!”** What does God mean by this? It’s simple. The Temple (which was the focal point of God’s covenant with Israel) required money and resources to operate! The constant provision of animals for sacrifices in the Temple, and the provision of grain and cattle to be tithed to the priests and the Levites, so that they could do the service of the Temple, required a prosperous nation. God provided this prosperity by causing Israel’s fields to bring forth, and their cattle to multiply abundantly—*as long as they remained faithful to Him*. The bottom line, then, is this: God gave *Israel* the ability to get wealth so that they might serve Him, and carry out all the requirements of His Covenant; and likewise, God gives *us* the ability to earn our bread, so that *we* might serve Him. God wants us to use our money, talents, and resources for the advancement of *His* Kingdom.

Being anxious over food, drink, and clothing is unbecoming of a Kingdom citizen. Why? Because this is how the *heathen* think! **(Read verses 31 and 32 again.)** The Gentiles, who knew not God, could think only of the things of this world. They were strangers to God’s covenant. They knew nothing of the loving, personal God of Israel, who promises to take care of those who love and serve Him, and who promises eternal hope beyond the grave. The Gentiles’ gods were wicked and whimsical, and could not be counted upon. In contrast, Israel’s God is ever true, righteous, and faithful. We do not *need* to worry, as long as we are faithfully serving God! Even if and when disaster fall, we know that our God has a purpose in it, and that He will sustain us! He already knows our needs; but He *wants us to ask*, in faith.

II. The promise of provision (v. 33)

(Read verse 33 again.) It is important to remember that in this sermon, Jesus is addressing citizens of the Kingdom of *Heaven* (the coming 1,000-year Kingdom here on earth). Jesus said, **“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”** Obviously, this is a promise that won’t be fulfilled until the Kingdom Age. (The meek are definitely *not* inheriting the earth right now!) When Christ returns to set up His 1,000-year Kingdom, both Jewish and Gentile believers will reign with Him in His Kingdom. The Kingdom of Heaven will be outward, visible, physical, and global. Yet, here in **Matthew 6:33**, Jesus uses a different term: He says, **“But seek ye first the Kingdom of God.”** Is the Kingdom of God the same thing as the Kingdom of Heaven? No. The **Kingdom of Heaven** is the *visible, physical*, 1,000-year Kingdom that will be established on earth after Christ returns; but the **Kingdom of God** is the universal, invisible, spiritual realm of those who are born again. Jesus defined the Kingdom of God as *invisible* when He said, **“The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation.”**

Read Luke 17:20-21.

Read John 3:1-8.

In **John 3:1-8**, Jesus made it clear that the condition for entrance into the Kingdom of God is the new birth. The Kingdom of God began after Christ's resurrection, when believers began to be indwelt permanently by the Holy Spirit; and it continues to this day. Today, whenever a person believes on Jesus, he is immediately indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and is born into the Kingdom of God. Of course, all believers will one day partake of the **Kingdom of Heaven**, as well; but for now, all believers are members of an *invisible* Kingdom—the **Kingdom of God**. After Christ returns, the **Kingdom of God** and the **Kingdom of Heaven** will merge and overlap, because at that point, *everyone on earth* will be saved! Every person on earth will be a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, *and* of the Kingdom of God, by way of the New Birth!

So, we know that “**Kingdom of God**” is the invisible realm of all who are born again. However, what does it mean to “seek” the Kingdom of God? This command applies to two groups of people. **First, this command applies to the lost.** To the lost, this is an invitation to *enter* the Kingdom. However, there is a condition for receiving the invitation: you must *want* the Kingdom of God. Many lost people never enter into the Kingdom of God because they care only about the things of *this* world (“*What shall we eat? What shall we drink? And wherewithal shall we be clothed?*”). To this day, the question of “How would I *survive* if I become a Christian?” is very real, since persecution of Christians is commonplace. People in many countries face the prospect of losing employment if they become a Christian—or of having their homes, their property, their children, their liberty, or their very lives taken from them. Even here in the West, where there is freedom, there is still a price tag for being a Christian. Friends and family *will* reject you. That is why, in order to be saved, you must turn your back on the world, and seek to be *joined to the Kingdom of God*, by placing your faith in Jesus. Tragically, most people are not willing to do this. They prefer to remain in their sin, and under God’s condemnation, rather than to suffer for Christ during this short time on earth.

If you wish to miss hell and go to Heaven, then you must desire the Kingdom of God; *and*, you must also desire Christ’s “**righteousness.**” Jesus said, “***But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.***” You must desire to have Christ’s righteousness put onto your account, so that God can accept you. This is called *justification*—being declared *judicially* righteous, as though you had no sin. Furthermore, you must also desire to have Christ’s *actual* righteousness. If you want to go to Heaven, then you must, in your heart, turn from sin, and ask Christ to come into your life, so that *He* can give you the power to live righteously. A person who says, “I want to go to Heaven,” but who has no desire to make Christ his *Master*, so that he can live a godly life, is fooling himself. Such a “faith” is not real faith at all. Jesus said, “***The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.***” You see, when you place your faith in Christ, it is just the *beginning* of a life that will be lived by *faith* from henceforth. Consider the testimony of the widow of Zarephath.

Read 1 Kings 17:1-16.

As far as we know, this was the first time that this Gentile woman had ever met a true believer in the God of Israel. At that very moment, she was gathering sticks to make what *she thought* would be the last meal for herself and her son. Yet, right at this moment of desperation, God brought one of His servants to her; and suddenly, she was asked to *trust* the God of Israel with her very *life*. By being asked to make a cake for Elijah *first*, she was, in essence, being asked to believe in Israel’s God, and to put *Him* first—because Elijah was God’s representative!

Most people would have laughed in Elijah's face; yet, this widow believed, and obeyed; and according to Jesus (in **Luke 4**), this woman was *saved* not only physically, but *spiritually*! She trusted God not only for her *physical* need, but for her *spiritual* need of salvation. And the result? Because she chose to live by faith in the God of Israel, God miraculously provided just enough flour and oil each day to make bread for herself, her son, *and* Elijah, for the remainder of the famine. If she hadn't trusted God enough to give to *Him* first, God would not have provided food for the rest of those 3 ½ years; and she and her son would *both* have died.

The amazing thing about this woman's conversion is that she was being asked, from the very start, to trust God in a practical, daily way. Yet, should this be so surprising? A person who has true faith in God does not merely entrust his *soul* to God for *salvation*: he also entrusts his *whole life* to the Lord. True faith is willing to put God "**first**" in everything. If this woman had *said* that she believed that Elijah was speaking God's words, yet refused to make a cake for him, her claim that she "believed" would have been empty. As James said, "**Faith without works is dead.**" The Lord must always come first in the hearts of His people.

This brings us to the second group of people to whom this command applies. Not only does this apply to the *lost*: **it also applies to the saved**. Those who are saved are already in the Kingdom of God; but we should *continually* seek the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness. As we serve Christ faithfully, God promises to provide us with food, drink, clothing, and our other needs; but the condition is that *God and His Kingdom must come first*. What if Pastor White and Cheryl *hadn't* put God first by going out door-knocking that night—or if they had determined to pack up and go back to Ohio? My guess is that God wouldn't have provided the food, the petrol money, the petrol card, or the job! By the way, if you think that's just a "one-off" string of lucky breaks, you're wrong. I know *many* Christians who have experienced this kind of thing. There was a time, years ago, when **Dr. Strouse** (the pastor of Bible Baptist Church in Cromwell, Connecticut) was struggling to feed his family. They didn't even have the money to buy one small turkey for their family for Thanksgiving. Well, during their prayer and Bible reading at breakfast one morning, they prayed specifically that God would provide a turkey. Just as they were finishing their prayer, they heard a thump at the front door. Their oldest son ran to the door, and opened it; and as he stepped onto the porch, he tripped over a turkey which someone had just left there. By the time Thanksgiving came, they had been given *three* turkeys; and they had never mentioned their needs to anyone! Perhaps you say, "Well, that's not a miracle, because it didn't appear miraculously from the sky." Folks, God doesn't need to make food fall from the sky, when He can use His *people* to bless others! God commands us to "**do good to all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.**" God has used me and my wife to give to others in times of great need; and *we* have been on the receiving end many times, as well. God will *always* provide when we put Him first!

Christian, God commands us *not* to be afraid. Hundreds of times in Scripture, God says, "Fear not"! The lost are *filled* with fears, because they have no hope beyond the grave, or even in *this* life. There are more than 400 clinically named "phobias" out there—everything from arachnophobia (fear of spiders), to pogonophobia (fear of beards), to mysophobia (fear of germs), to pentheraphobia (fear of your mother-in-law), to nomophobia (fear of not having a phone), to thanatophobia (fear of death)! However, we who know Christ need not fear death, or the future, because we have a Father who is always faithful. **(Read Matthew 6:34.)**

Read Philippians 4:10-13.

Conclusion: Jesus says, “*Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*” In other words, you have enough troubles to attend to today: so why worry about *tomorrow*? Christian, you have no power to evade the troubles and calamities that God has appointed to you; and likewise, you have no power to make things go well for you. *Everything* is under God’s sovereign control. He will always provide you with your physical needs, and with the *grace and comfort* that you need in times of trial, *if* you will just trust Him! As we close this morning, **I would also invite you who are not saved** to repent of your sin and believe on Jesus, while you still can. God has been merciful in this life by providing you with physical and material needs; but this doesn’t mean that you are His child. To miss hell, and go to Heaven, you must repent of your sin, believe on Christ, and be born again into God’s family. Please trust Christ today!