

Matthew 6:24-34

We all know something about how to prioritize our lives. You don't need to be a Christian to acknowledge that some things take priority. Even when we fail to prioritize in a responsible way, we still know that we should have done so. How many people look back on their lives and wish that they would have read fewer books, spent less time with their kids, or devoted more hours to playing Mario Cart? We naturally know that our children are more important than our hobbies, that being healthy is more important than winning, and having food and clothing is more important than having a bigger house or a fancier car. Any unbeliever, if he only stops to consider it, can recognize that the basic things in life should take priority.

But Jesus teaches us to prioritize something much more precious even than our children. It's more necessary even than good health. It's more urgent even than basic food, drink, and clothing. Jesus teaches us to seek first, before anything else, the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

But he doesn't stop there. He also says, "And all these things will be added unto you." You see, Jesus cares about your children. Jesus cares about your health. Jesus cares about your food and drink and clothing. Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But he knows that you need his kingdom and righteousness more than anything else. You need the assurance that God does not count your sins against you. You need Christ's perfect blood and righteousness to cover all your guilt and shame. You need the hope of eternal life in heaven, the resurrection of your body, and the joy of God's kingdom.

So what does it mean to prioritize God's kingdom and righteousness? Of course it means to trust his promise. This is the confidence that even if all your food runs out, even if your health fails, even if your family and all your goods are destroyed, you will still have what God has given you. Such trust is not just a thought you keep in the back of your mind. It's not like car insurance, which you pay a couple times a year, stick the card in your pocket, and then never think about it unless you need it. No, Jesus teaches us to seek his kingdom and righteousness. Seek it. This means that you trust it. And it also means that you hope in it. You look for it. You love it. You strive for it. You are devoted to it. Because you know that nothing in your life is truly blessed without it.

This obviously means that you prioritize going to church on Sunday mornings. You prioritize leading your family in prayer and the reading of God's Word at home. If you look for a spouse, you recognize that finding someone who loves God's Word is more crucial than good looks or even intelligence. It means that you recognize that children who know and confess their Savior are much greater than smart and successful unbelievers. In other words, it means that you don't treat God's kingdom and righteousness as something that bends to your schedule or to the priorities of this world.

People have told me that Sunday is family day, their only chance to spend quality time together. After all, work, school, and all sorts of extracurricular activities consume their lives. But why have you let this happen? Why do you need so much stuff? What are you trying to prove? Whom are you serving? Are you serving God who alone can give you rest not only for your body but also for your soul? Or are you serving Mammon and earthly wealth, which will never let you have any lasting peace?

Knowing how to prioritize your time and life is not what makes someone a Christian. Lots of heathen know how to spend time with their families. They know how to find joy in the simple things. Being involved in sports and other activities certainly helps to keep kids out of trouble and makes them more disciplined. Getting an education, bettering yourself in your mental or physical health – these have their merits. But you are a fool if you think that mastering these

things will spare you of the worries and anxieties of this life. The reality is that these earthly things so naturally become masters of us. And they will never give us peace no matter how much we serve them.

If we are honest, then we all must admit that this is true. Jesus teaches us that we shouldn't worry even about food and clothing. Yet we all know that the cares of this life include much more than what we eat, drink, and put on. If only these were all we worried about! Even the most fulfilling and rewarding tasks, like raising kids, managing a business, teaching students, and leading a team are enough to make us worry about all sorts of things. What if my children get sick or make bad decisions? What if my customers stop showing up? What if my pupils forget everything I taught them? What if people don't respect me? There is no shortage of toil under the sun. And while reading, exercise, and other good disciplines certainly help relieve stress, they won't save us from the worry and anxiety of this earthly life.

Why is that? Why so much worry? It's all part of the curse of sin. It's God's punishment on fallen humanity. He told Adam that he would work the ground with toil, eating bread by the sweat of his brow. He told the woman that she would have great pain and sorrow in bearing children. St. Paul tells us that all creation has been bound to vanity, destined to waste away, groaning with labor pains. This is all God's judgment.

All flesh is like grass. It shoots up, and it just as quickly fades away. And yet, the plants of this earth are beautiful while they last. Jesus says that Solomon, in all his glory, was never dressed as beautifully as the flowers in the field. Yet the flowers are here today, and tomorrow they are thrown into the fire. Everything Solomon had, the success of his reign, his outstanding wisdom and ability to grow his kingdom – it all faded away like the lilies of the field. Even the temple he built for the Lord, which was filled with God's own glory, ended up burned down and destroyed by the Babylonians. Listen to what Solomon himself says in the beginning of his book of Ecclesiastes:

I, the preacher, have been king of Israel in Jerusalem. I used my wisdom to study, search and explore everything done under the sun. It's a sorry task God has given people to weary themselves with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun. It's all vanity, like trying to catch the wind. You can't straighten out what is twisted, and you can't count what is not there. (Ecc. 1:12-14)

Solomon is not insulting the work God gave him to do as king over Israel. He isn't despising God's gift of wisdom and intelligence either. The work itself isn't vain and pointless. The intelligence itself isn't vain and pointless. But it is limited. It comes to an end. Your children aren't pointless. Your family isn't pointless. Your life and duties are not pointless. Because God gives these things, and he never does anything in vain. Instead, when we try to bless these things more than God blesses them, then our efforts are vain and pointless. And the thought that we can make them last longer than God has allowed is downright foolish.

Everything you do, and everything anyone else does in this world, will eventually come to an end and be forgotten. You can't change this. You can't straighten this out. No amount of ingenuity or innovation from men can add even an inch to our lives. God has set a limit to everything we do. He counts every hair. Not even a bird falls to the ground apart from his will. And this puts our priorities into perspective. Jesus says that when you seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, then all these other things will be added unto you. When you see to it that your home and heart are always fed with the words of eternal life, then you find peace for your soul. And when your soul is at peace, then your body can bear much more than you thought. When you run to the gospel every chance you get for the assurance that your sins are forgiven and your inheritance is secured for you in heaven, then the cares and troubles of this life show themselves to be much lighter than they first seem. When you thirst for the body and blood of

Jesus, realizing that you need his token of pardon and peace more than anything in the world, then this gives meaning to all your work and labor under the sun. Because if God is so gracious to feed you in this way, then certainly he will bless everything else. If God did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, then certainly he will also give us all good things. When you seek God's kingdom and righteousness, then this gives you an entirely new outlook. It prioritizes and reorients your entire life. You begin to see how everything on earth serves to point you to what God has prepared for you in his kingdom. Even while their life is so short, the beautiful lilies that dance in the field teach you to rejoice in the beautiful dress of Christ's righteousness, with which he clothed you in your baptism. If the birds don't know where their next meal is coming from, how much less do you know how bread and wine can be Christ's body and blood? Yet, as confidently as the birds can receive their food, much more can we rely on the Word and testament of our Savior. Even the trials and sadness of this life teach you to repent of your sins as you look to Christ who bore his cross to make atonement for your sins. The darkness teaches you to pray for God to give you light. The rising sun teaches you to rejoice in the risen Christ who will raise you up on the last day. Yes, you begin to see how all creation declares the glory of God.

When you have this eternal hope as your priority, then you can take an honest look at this world and the span of your life, knowing full well that it will soon come to an end. When will this be? Only God knows. Instead, look at the troubles that are right in front of you. Then ask yourself what you need first, before anything else. That one thing needful is enough. And it will never fade away. Amen.