



January 13, 2013  
Matthew 6:19-34  
Pastor Larry Adams

## Seek First His Kingdom

Well, if you have your Bibles today, I'd like you to turn with me to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. Today we're gonna be focusing on this section in Matthew Chapter 6 about the kingdom of God.

As I mentioned in my prayer, the beginning of a new year is a time for all of us to be focusing our priorities and thinking about what really matters in our lives and what really counts.

I want to give a good morning welcome to all the folks down at the Antioch campus. Thank you for your faithfulness and for being with us today, and we know you're having some great worship down there. Thank you too that we are part of this together in serving this area and this community and the world.

We had a priority moment yesterday as our family had the memorial service for my wife's dad. I appreciate all of you who prayed and some of you who could come and the many kind expressions. But I was reminded yesterday, though he lived 95 years, if you would have asked him, he would have told you that time went by awfully quick. I can tell you the older I get, the faster time seems to go. Each passing year, as I come to a new year, I have a time of assessment. How did I really use that last year? Did I get any closer to Jesus than I was the year before? Am I more in love with his word than I was the year before? Am I more in love with him? Am I living more and more for the purpose of his kingdom?

When Jesus Christ preached, there was no question that he spent more time talking about the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven than almost any other subject because he wanted people to understand that the kingdom of this earth is passing away. There is a kingdom we're a part of as Christians that's forever. We are to be making substantial investments in that kingdom. In fact, we are to be living for that kingdom first because it's forever, and the kingdom of this world has to fit into its proper place. If we get those things mixed up, our lives will never be as meaningful or fulfilled as they could be if we would live our lives with the priority of kingdom first.

That's what Jesus was talking about in this section of the greatest sermon ever preached. In Matthew 6 beginning in verse 19, this is how Jesus addressed the crowds that day:

**Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

**<sup>22</sup>The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. <sup>23</sup> But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!**

**<sup>24</sup> No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.**

**<sup>25</sup> Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup> Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?**

**<sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" <sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.**

Let's pray for a moment.

*Lord, those must've been some pretty powerful words when you spoke them to first century Israelites, first century Gentiles. There were no long-term contracts. There were no labor unions. There were no guarantees of tomorrow for any of them. "Give us this day our daily bread" was an urgent prayer. Like many in parts of the world today, they can't count on tomorrow's blessing. They have to trust you for it each day. Yet we find that many of us who have abundance, who have houses, who have multiple clothes in our closet and more shoes than we can wear, cars – plural -- that we're driving, and so many other benefits, we find we are the most worrying generation that may have ever been. We're chasing after things, some things that we already have, things that can never satisfy completely.*

*So, Lord, as you spoke this word to a people who were deeply impacted by it, I pray you'd help us to see too that no matter what our lot in this life, if we're looking to you, we don't have to worry. We need to seek first your kingdom, and all these things will be added to us. We thank you, God, for that perspective today. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

"Dad, what would you miss the most?" I was sitting with Karla and the girls in a pizza joint over in Lovelock, Nevada on our 21<sup>st</sup> wedding anniversary. I am a hopeless romantic. I pick the best spots to do the most significant things. It was in that moment, that Kimie asked one of those life questions that challenge you to think through your real priorities.

“Dad, if we never went back to California, what would you miss the most?” You see, what she was asking me is “What matters to you? What’s really important to you?” She was asking a life priority question as a 12-year-old girl.

After a moment of reflection, Karla and I said together, “The church. The church is what we’d miss the most because of the people and because of the kingdom work that we’re engaged in together.”

While questions like that take you back a bit, they’re good for us because it’s easy to develop wrong priorities. It’s easy to start living for things that don’t last. It’s actually easy to be consumed by pursuing them. It’s good to be confronted with questions like that to make sure our hearts and our desires and our life goals are in the right place continually because I’ll tell you, we live in a culture that is masterful in getting us convinced that we need to chase after all kinds of things if we’re gonna have life that’s really life.

Questions like that are good for us. Perhaps that’s why Jesus asked so many of those life-prioritizing questions. When he asked the people, “**Why do you worry?**” He went on to tell them why they never have to.

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew Chapters 5, 6, and 7 is the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest speaker whoever spoke about the greatest subject ever addressed. The Sermon on the Mount speaks of the righteous rule of King Jesus and the advancement of his glorious kingdom.

The kingdom of God is the most often presented theme in the word of God. It generally is a term referring to two spheres. The Spirit of God’s sovereign rule over all creation is considered to be also the kingdom of God. It’s what the psalmist was writing about in Psalm 24 when he said, “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. That the King of Glory is the one who reigns.” He reigns over his kingdom.

But the sphere is also that point in any given moment in time when the righteous rule of God is exercised among us where we see Jesus truly operating in our lives and the lives of others as King. Jesus said in Luke 17 verse 21, “The kingdom of God is among you (or the kingdom of God is in you),” because the kingdom of God is wherever the King is. He lives in those who believe in him.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is elaborating in detail about what life would look like and should look like when the King is living in the people who are a part of his kingdom. In short, Jesus said that the citizens of God’s kingdom would be a very different kind of people. They would be kingdom people. Jesus said that his disciples must live lives qualitatively different from those of the pagans or simply religious world around them. His kingdom citizens were not just to refrain from worldly passions and priorities, but they were to replace them with passions and priorities that were of far greater significance.

For example, look at what is already taught them to this point in the Sermon on the Mount “that you’ll be blessed if you live God’s way, which is opposite of what you’d been taught. That you are to be salt and light: flavoring, preserving, and illuminating a world that needs to see God. Don’t live for outward appearance only,” he said, “become truly righteous within, for God sees it all. It’s not enough to avoid physical adultery,” he said, “I want my people to live with purity of thought. Take marriage seriously as a lifelong

covenant and do not get divorced. Be people of your word. No need to swear by anything. Let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' mean 'no.' Don't seek revenge the way others do. If you're wrong, offer the other cheek too. Love your friends but also love your enemies. Give to people who are in need, not to be noticed but to truly help. Live a life of heartfelt prayer, and forgive as the Lord forgave you. Let your devotion be truly to seek God, not to be seen by men. Don't live with the world's priorities. Don't seek to amass material things, but make sure you store up treasures in heaven that will last. Make up your mind whom you will serve, God or money, because you can't serve them both. Don't worry about all the things the pagan world worries about. Don't let food, clothing, and shelter and the material be your #1 focus. Instead," he said, "do this: seek first my kingdom and my righteousness."

Now, people, I don't know about you, but when I read that list I start feeling deeply convicted right out of the box because Jesus was not describing an extraordinary life. He was describing a normal life, the way God designed it to be, a radically different life, righteously different. God intended over time, through that kingdom influence and his people, the world would start living like the church. But if we're honest, in far too many cases, the church -- which is the visible presence of Jesus in the world -- the church is beginning to look more and more and more like the world with its priorities, its desires, its entertainment, all of that.

One of the primary reasons for this is that far too many Christians are not living for God and the kingdom first. They're not fulfilling their calling to be different, to have a different character, a different conduct, a different priority, a different life. For the most part, the world looks at Christians and sees no difference except that we burn a very valuable day on Sunday being a way to do something they don't see as important or even understand. It's the only difference they see most the time. The primary reason is not living first for the kingdom.

In this portion of his sermon, Jesus confronts his people with a question that challenges them and us to think through our true life ambition. "**Why do you worry? Why do you chase after things? For there can be,**" he said, "**only one of two ambitions that will capture our hearts.**" You can have an ambition for self where we're focused on building our own kingdom and feeling we have to provide all these things for ourselves, or there will be an ambition for God, which is heavily investing first in building and advancing his kingdom. "To seek first his kingdom" is to live life with a "God first" ambition. The true Christian's highest ambition is the advancement of God's kingdom for his glory.

How is that advancement made? When each believer seeks first the righteous rule of God in his own life. God's kingdom is advanced when each believer seeks first God's righteous rule in his own life. Here's how Jesus put it in verse 31:

**So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?"** <sup>32</sup> **For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.** <sup>33</sup> **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.** <sup>34</sup> **Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.**

Seeking first God's kingdom is contrary to everything the world and the culture will seek to get you to do. The heart and soul and priorities of a culture can be seen in its arts and literature. The literature of our culture reeks on a focus of self.

I'm gonna quote today a number of times from John Stott's excellent commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, because in it John Stott, I believe, captures the essence of our age and the dangers that confront kingdom living where so many people are getting caught up in chasing things that will actually destroy them. The reason that so many people worry and do not have satisfaction in life is they haven't understood the significance of living kingdom first so that everything else can fit in its place. John Stott said in his commentary:

A few years ago I was sent a complimentary copy of *Accent Magazine*, a new, glossy magazine whose full title was *Accent on Good Living*. It included enticing advertisements for champagne, cigarettes, food, clothing, antiques, and carpets together with the description of an esoteric weekend shopping in Rome.

There were articles on "How to have a computer in your kitchen," "How to win a luxury cabin cruiser," or a 112 bottle case of Scotch whiskey instead, "How 15 million women cannot be wrong about their cosmetic choices." We were then promised in the following months' issue alluring articles on Caribbean holidays, staying in bed, high fashion warm underwear, and the delights of reindeer meat and snowberries.

From beginning to end, it concerned the welfare of the body: how to feed it, clothe it, warm it, cool it, refresh it, relax it, entertain it, titivate it, and titillate it. Now, please do not misunderstand this, Jesus Christ neither denies nor despises the needs of the body. As a matter of fact, he made it himself and he takes care of it, but he has just taught us to pray "**Give us this day our daily bread.**" What is he saying then? He is emphasizing that to become engrossed in material comforts is a false preoccupation.

Why is it a false preoccupation? Because it's a misplaced ambition. First of all, Jesus said it's unproductive. All of that chasing after things won't produce anything. Verse 27:

**Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?**

In other words, he's saying, "**Name one thing that your worrying actually accomplishes?**" It doesn't accomplish anything. It's unproductive. It's a misplaced ambition because it's unnecessary. He said in verse 28:

**And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" <sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.**

There isn't a thing that you can inform God of. He knows our needs better than we do, but he also knows how to strip things away from us to show us that we really don't need them. We need him. We will in our lives all go through periods of losses. I've been through them where I've had abundance and then had things stripped down to the bare essence. God asks you in those moments, **"Are you just as content with me right now in little as you were in much?"** God knows how to wean us off the things of this world. Then he said they're a misplaced ambition because chasing after stuff is unworthy of us. Verse 25:

**Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?**

People, we're not on the same plane with the animals, the birds, and creation. We are unique in all of it. We are more valuable to God than anything he's ever made. He said, **"If you go chasing after all these things, what you're really saying is, 'God, I need to do it because you can't, and I must not be as valuable to you as you say.'"**

Jesus is saying, **"Don't you realize how valuable you are to God? He's gonna take care of you. Maybe not to the way you're accustomed or to the standard the world has told you you need. Remember, if you own a car you're already in the top 5% of the world's wealthy."**

Such a self-focus material ambition that controls most people's every waking moment portrays a false view of humanity that downgrades us to simple creatures. It was the Epicurean view that Paul and the other apostles fought against so hard that this is all you get so eat, drink, and be merry, because if you don't do it no one else will.

Stott said:

People live as if they were only bodies needing to be fed, watered, clothed, and housed. They treat human life as if it were merely a physiological mechanism needed be protected, lubricated, and fueled. An exclusive preoccupation with food, drink, and clothing could be justified only if physical survival were the be-all and end-all of existence. We just live to live then. Then, indeed, how to sustain the body would be our proper first concern. So it's understandable that in emergency famine conditions the struggle to survive must take precedence over other things.

But for this to be so an ordinary circumstance would express a reductionistic concept of man which is totally unacceptable. It would downgrade him to a level of animals, indeed to that of birds and plants, and yet the great majority of today's advertisements are directed towards the body: Underwear to display it at its shapeliest, deodorants to keep it smelling sweet, alcoholic beverages and other things to pep it up when it's languishing. This preoccupation prompts these questions: Is physical well-being a worthy object to which to devote our lives? Has human life no more significance than the body?

The Gentiles or the pagans seek all these things, let them. **“But as for you, my disciples,”** Jesus implies, **“they are a hopelessly unworthy goal for they are not the supreme good in life. This is: my kingdom. Seek it first and his righteousness, and all these things you worry about will be supplied you by him who knows your need better than you do.”** That doesn’t mean you’re gonna have the house you want. It doesn’t mean you’re gonna drive the cars you want, wear the clothes you want, eat where you want, but it means that God’s gonna supply all those things for you.

You know what? You’ll be better off and happier than chasing after a lot of stuff that satisfies when kingdom is second and everything else is first. Seek first God’s kingdom. Stott said:

When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God, he was not referring to the general sovereignty of God over nature and history but to that specific rule of his own people, which he himself had inaugurated, and which begins in anybody’s life when he humbles himself, repents, believes, and submits to being born again.

God’s kingdom is Jesus Christ ruling over his people in total blessing and total demand. To seek first his kingdom is the desire as of first importance the spread of the reign of Jesus Christ. Such a desire will start with ourselves until every single department of our life: our home, our marriage and family, our personal morality, our professional life, our business ethics, our bank balance, our tax returns, our lifestyle, our citizenship is joyfully and freely submissive to Jesus. It will continue in our immediate environment with the exception of evangelistic responsibilities towards our relatives and colleagues and neighbors and friends, and it will also reach out in global concern for the missionary witness of his church.

You know, when I read these things I ask, “Can we really bring our lives under God’s total righteous control? Can I do that? Can you do that? Can we really live to make a difference in his eternal kingdom?” Yes, we can. In fact, as I already mentioned, this was not an extraordinary thing Jesus was describing, this was the description of the normal Christian life for kingdom people, the norm. One of the reasons that we don’t see more of God’s blessing in our life is that we are not willing to submit and put kingdom first.

**“For a believer not to experience this normal kingdom-impacting life was due to a lack of two things,”** Jesus seems to be implying. One was simply common sense. Verse 26:

**Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup> Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?**

Jesus said, **“Look how God cares for creation. Are you saying that he really can’t care for you, the most valuable part of his creation? If you say, ‘I can’t give. I can’t pray. I can’t serve in God’s kingdom because I have to care for my needs first,’ then you’ve forgotten who cares for you,”** is what he’s saying.

It's interesting, the more you get that you feel responsible for, the more you worry about it. But if it's kingdom first and you realize you own nothing, then you don't worry about holding on to it because it's not yours. You know that whatever God takes to use for his glory he will supply whatever need is in your heart he sees needs to be met. **"It's not just a lack of common sense, it's a lack of faith,"** he said. Verse 28:

**Why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.<sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.<sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?**

If you worry about life's necessities, you're testifying to your lack of faith. That's what I had to come to learn because I used to worry about this stuff all the time. What I came to realize I was telling God every day, "God, I really don't believe that you care," or, "I don't believe that you can provide my needs."

That's why at times people who say, "You know, I can't tithe. I can't give time to serve. I've got too many demands on my time. I've got too limited amount of money." Those kinds of statements are testifying for a lack of faith.

It's why Jesus said that the secret to successful kingdom living was to seek the kingdom priorities first and then the other needs that you have will be supplied. **"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."**

You see, when our primary ambition is seeking to advance God's kingdom then our secondary ambitions will be acceptable because they too will begin to serve God's kingdom as he intended. John Stott put it like this:

Indeed, it is then that secondary ambitions become healthy. When you seek the kingdom of God first, then all the other things that we also can care about fit into their proper place. Christians should be eager to develop their gifts, widen their opportunities, extend their influence, and be given promotion in their work not now to boost their own ego or build their own empire, but rather through everything they do to bring glory to God. Lesser ambitions are safe and right, provided that they are not an end in themselves but the means to a greater end, the spread of God's kingdom and his righteousness, and therefore to the greatest of all lands, namely God's glory. This is the supreme good which we are to seek first. There is no other.

This is an especially important focus as we begin the new year. I'm not all for New Year's resolutions. I've made too many of those over the years, and I break them all the time. It's not bad that we make them, it's just that they're seldom kept and soon forgotten. I'm not talking about a New Year's resolution here. I'm talking about a serious assessment and inventory of our real priorities as people. Maybe it just seems more critical to me because of the recent relational losses that we've had. But I'm telling you as I'm coming into this year I'm asking myself the question, "Jesus, am I really living kingdom first in everything, because I don't want to hold anything back? Am I a kingdom-first person, or am I really living with my needs and my wants as my top priority and I'm veiling that I'm an under a cover of spirituality?"

Jesus said, **“First, seek my kingdom and my righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well.”**

How can I tell if I’m living with a kingdom-first priority? Well, almost everywhere you look in the Bible, it doesn’t matter whether it was the children of Israel who came out with Moses, or whether it was David in the beginning of the monarchy, whether it was Ezra and the return of the exiles, whether it was God-fearing Gentiles like the centurion Cornelius in Acts 10, or whether it was the example of the believers in the early church. Wherever you look, I find a consistent pattern that those who are living for God and living for the kingdom and living by faith and seeking Christ, their lives of kingdom dedication were marked in the way that they prayed, in the way that they gave, in the way that they served. It showed. That’s a great indicator of our kingdom priorities. Our praying shows faith and absolute dependence upon God.

I am jazzed about tomorrow’s Prayer Day, but it isn’t just about Prayer Day where we set apart extraordinary times to seek the face of God. It’s every single day being able to meet God in that way. People who make prayer a priority are seeking to live kingdom first. It’s not just praying for our needs and the needs of our family. As we’re learning, Jesus takes care of those things, and it’s not wrong to ask for those needs to be met, but it’s kingdom praying that needs to be included in it. Jesus’ pattern for prayer in Matthew 6 verse 9 went like this:

**This, then, is how you should pray:**

**‘Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
<sup>10</sup> your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.**

Then it was:

**<sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread.  
<sup>12</sup> Forgive us our debts**

--and all those other things. It’s kingdom-first praying. That’s how he taught the disciples to pray. Praying for the strengthening of the church, praying for lost people to be saved, praying for God’s word to be boldly going forth, praying for people to give, to serve, to pray, to live holy lives, praying for God to be glorified in his disciples to go out and to impact the world and to see the nations come to Christ. We need to be interceding for these kingdom things. It’s amazing how it revolutionizes your praying.

When people make praying like that a priority, they are seeking first the kingdom. But it’s also in their giving. Giving or handling of money and possessions is one of the clearest indicators of our commitment to kingdom priorities and a vibrant faith in God. Jesus said, **“Our view of giving as a priority shows three things. It shows first where our real treasure lies.”** Verse 19:

**Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and**

**where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

I've heard people teach this thing: "You're not supposed to have a savings account." It's ridiculous. That's not what Jesus was talking about. He's said, **"If you're living kingdom first then you're gonna make the firstfruits of your resources go to God first, and then learn with God's help how he wants you to manage the rest for your needs and other kingdom things he wants to accomplish. But if you're trying to meet your needs first with what he gives you, it'll never be enough. It never satisfies. You have to put kingdom first and then the rest of it can fall in place."** He'll show you how to live on less. Amazing.

Then he said, **"Giving shows how much we really understand about God's kingdom priorities."** Verse 22:

**<sup>22</sup>The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. <sup>23</sup> But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!**

**"How much do we really understand and see God's kingdom priorities so that we will not live in this darkness, we'll come into the light and live the way God designed it to be?"** is what he's saying. This kind of giving also shows who our master is and who or what we are really serving.

**<sup>24</sup> No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.**

Something has to be first. If God is first, the rest will fit in place. Those who make giving to God a priority are demonstrating their faith, their understanding God's ability to provide for them, and a true surrender to Jesus Christ as Master and Lord. That's why I'm telling people all the time, one of the earliest lessons I learned about surrender to the kingdom was learning to tithe. I don't know why it's important. It just works. You trust God and say, "God, I'm gonna give you a tenth of what I have." By the way, when I made that commitment I didn't have that much. "I'm gonna give you a tenth of what I've got, Lord, and I want to grow on that over time." God has blessed that and has taught me about keeping things in their proper priorities. He's used that as much as anything our family has ever done. We taught our kids do that from the time they were tiny, and they're still doing it.

There's no time like the beginning of a new year to begin stepping out and putting God first in our giving, in our praying, and also in our serving; using our God-given gifts, time, and ability to serve Jesus Christ in ways that grow our faith and strengthen his church and advance his kingdom.

I'm out of time, so let me conclude with this. There was a breakfast at which Billy Graham was speaking. Billy Graham said:

Nearly 200 years ago there were two Scottish brothers named John and David Livingstone. John had set his mind on making money and becoming wealthy, and he did. But under his name in an old edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, John Livingstone is listed simply as “The brother of David Livingstone.”

Who is David Livingstone? While John had dedicated himself to making money, David had knelt and prayed, surrendering himself to Christ and to building of his kingdom. He said, “I will place no value on anything I have or possess unless it is in relationship to the kingdom of God.”

“I will place no value on anything I have or possess unless it is in relationship to the kingdom of God.”

The inscription over his burial place in Westminster Abbey reads, “For 30 years his life was spent in unworried effort to evangelize the lost.” Many credit him with opening up the entire interior of Africa to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

On his 59<sup>th</sup> birthday, David Livingstone wrote, “My Jesus, my King, my life, my all, I again dedicate my whole self to thee.”

People, as we come to a new year, we have an opportunity to do the same thing and to ask the question, “What is my highest priority: Building and maintaining my own kingdom, or living to advance his kingdom and his righteousness? The answer is often seen in how we pray and give and serve.

I am very thankful for the number of people in this church that are truly kingdom-first people. It shows by the way you live. It encourages me to want to be more of that person too. As we begin this new year, there is not a single reason why every one of us cannot experience the blessing of being kingdom-first people who seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these other things will be added as well, living for a kingdom that is forever.

*Lord, I want to thank you for the beginning of this new year. I want to thank you, God, for questions that make us think and make us learn how to prioritize. Thank you for letting Karla and me and our family and our staff and all of us be a part of a church with so many people who are living kingdom first showing by the way they give, the way they pray, the way they serve. Thank you for a year in 2012 of great kingdom advancement.*

*Thank you for a time in 2012 when many of us experienced losses of all kinds, economic, job-wise, people we love. All of those things are used to help shape us and mold us and show us that we don't live for this world, we live for kingdom that's eternal. God, may this be a time when we truly become a key people who seek first your kingdom and experience the joys of what it really means to live for Jesus. We thank you, God, for the hope and promise of this coming year. We commit it to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.*