In God’s eternal Kingdom, seeking Jesus Christ alone as your greatest treasure, is our highest priority. He is to be our true love. He is to be whom we are seeking after, as our greatest treasure. Matthew 13 describes a man who is seeking after this very point. He is out looking for a treasure when he finds a pearl of great price. He sees that this is the critical thing that he needs to buy, so he goes out and he sells everything he has in order to possess that pearl. That pearl is Jesus Christ. Have we given everything to know Him? He is to be the fuel that drives us to achieve everything that we’re going to do in this walk with Christ. We can’t do it on our own. Seeking Jesus Christ effects how we worship, grow and serve. He is whom we are to emulate, so He is our strength, our power. When we do things on our own in our walk with Christ, we’re going about it incredibly backwards, because it’s all about seeking after Him first, that’s what gives us the power, the strength, and the ability to serve this ever-loving, all-knowing, all-powerful, gracious, loving God.

If you have your Bibles today, I’d like you to turn with me if you would, to the greatest sermon ever preached, the Sermon on the Mount, given by Jesus - Matthew chapter 6. It’s right in the heart of it. We’re going to be talking today about priorities in the Kingdom.

I want to take a moment to specially welcome all the people who are watching live with us on-line right now across the country and around the world; and especially thanks to those who are a part of our church who couldn’t be with us today, watching from home. We hope God is meeting the needs of your heart and He is drawing you closer to Himself.

In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus, addressing the huge crowd that had assembled to hear Him preach, turns the subject to the kingdom of God. The whole Sermon on the Mount is about that, but now He is talking about kingdom priorities, and He switches their focus from the things of the earth, to the things of Heaven, because this is a perspective that all of us need to live with in the light of eternity.

This is the way Jesus put it in Matthew 6:19-34 –
19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

24 “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

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 than food, and the body more than clothes? 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? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 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—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Father, these words shook things up that day when You preached them. Some were encouraged, others were challenged. It always changes things when we see life lived out in the light of eternity. In fact, Lord, if You could peel back the future just a little bit and let us see what’s coming, there’s a lot of things we would change. We wouldn’t give our lives to any frivolous things; we’d want everything to count. Somehow, when we put the kingdom first, You help us to keep all these other things in their right priority. So today, God, as we open Your word, help us to see what it means to live with kingdom priorities, as we live to advance the reign of Christ. And we’ll thank You, God, for all that You will show us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

All football season long, people have been asking me, Larry, what are you going to do if your two favorite teams are in the Super Bowl? I said, well, it’s likely not going to happen. Well – the New England Patriots whom I have rooted for for years, are in; and the Seattle Seahawks, whom I have rooted for since 1976 are in. But, the choice isn’t hard, because of my personal connections with the Seahawks, I hope my friend has another victory. And he sees those things as kingdom opportunities. So it’s hard not to root for people who have a kingdom perspective. You know, some would say that you are quite a fan, and I thought I was quite a fan until I read about this couple in Pittsburgh, PA. They are season ticket holders for the Seahawks! Pittsburgh, PA! Their whole family are season ticket holders, and they fly to every Seattle home game. Airfares, hotels, car rentals, not to mention the cost of tickets!
You know, when someone or something is your top priority, it shows. You are willing to arrange your time, your schedule, your money, and everything else to make sure what you want is really going to happen.

You know, when I was reading that article and looking through these things that Jesus taught, I couldn’t help but come to the question, what would it look like if someone had the kingdom of God as their top priority? That’s what Jesus was speaking to the crowd about that day in this great Sermon on the Mount.

We’re in week two of our study, God’s Eternal Kingdom: Living to Advance the Reign of Christ. Last week we took a closer look at the kingdom of God and we learned that the kingdom is the realm over which the king reigns. That kingdom is established in every heart when Jesus Christ comes to live in you by faith, and you trust Him as your Savior and Lord.

We saw last week that His reign advances through each and every believer and through His corporate body, the church, who is in the world to spread His name, His fame and His glory. And some day, His rule will be over all the earth. But right now, it is seen in the lives of those in whom He lives. The advancement and spread of Jesus’ kingdom and glory, is Jesus’ top priority. Therefore, it stands to reason that if Jesus has come to live in me, or if He has come to live in you, that my priority would be His priority, which is to live for the advancement of His kingdom. Jesus said you cannot be divided in your loyalties, and two kingdoms cannot hold top priority in your life. So, are you more focused on the kingdom of earth, which is passing away, or, are you more focused on the kingdom of God, which is eternal. Well, how would you know? Well, Jesus asked two penetrating themes of these people. He asked, where is your treasure?

Matthew 6:19-23 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

“Where is your treasure?” Jesus asked. Is it rooted more in things of earth or in things of heaven? Are you investing more and more of your time and money in the things that are passing away? Or are you investing more and more of them in the things that produce things that are eternal? One measure is how generous or stingy we are with God and the kingdom. That’s why he said in verse 22:

Matthew 6:22-23 22 The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”

The word ‘healthy’ is the word ‘generous’. And the word ‘unhealthy’ is the word ‘stingy’. This is implied by the words and the text that Jesus used.
So, what He is teaching is that, in response to the Kingdom, if you are generous in the investment of your time, your talent and your treasure in the things that are eternal, your eyes are healthy, generous. You see what the Kingdom is, and you see the eternal perspective, and your whole body is full of light because now your life is ordered by God’s priorities. But, if you’re stingy towards the Kingdom with your time, your talent and your treasure, your eyes are dark and you can’t see what’s important. You are out of balance and your priorities will be all fouled up. How great is that darkness, especially if you think that darkness you are living in, is the light.

And then, D. A. Carson once said, “the things most highly treasured occupy the heart, and control the person’s thoughts, emotions and will, and this controls the person’s directions and values.” It’s just what Jesus was saying.

The other thing is this: who or what is your master? Not just where is your treasure, but who or what is your master? He said in verse 24:

24 No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

You see, the answer to who your master is, is in what you serve. Jesus said you are a slave to what you serve, and what you serve is your master. So, do you serve money and what money can buy, and use God, OR, do you serve God and use money? A very big kingdom difference. You can’t serve them both, Jesus said. One will emerge as your master. The kingdom? Or money? God? Or what money can buy?

John Calvin used to say, “If money is rated the highest good, then forthwith, greed takes over the kingdom. If pleasure, then men will certainly degenerate into sheer self-indulgence.”

So Jesus in this sermon, sets the priority for us in verse 33, our memory verse for this week: “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Jesus teaches that a true disciple will have living for Christ and His kingdom their top priority. And how will that priority be seen? It will be seen in what we trust, and it will be seen in what we seek.

When Christ and His kingdom are top priority, it will be seen I how we trust. Jesus said in verse 25-32, 34 of Matthew 6:

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 than food, and the body more than clothes? 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? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 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—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry,
saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Scott Stossel is the editor of *Atlantic* magazine. He is also the author of a book entitled, *My Age of Anxiety: Fear, Hope, Dread, and the Search for Peace of Mind*. He published that book last year (2014) and in it, he openly shares about his lifelong attempts to deal with the “anguish of anxiety” as he calls it. He said from a early age, he has been what he called a “twitchy bundle of phobias, fears and neuroses.” Stossel writes,

Even when not actively afflicted by acute episodes of anxiety, I am buffeted by worry.” Stossel adds, “Here’s what I have tried, to deal with my anxiety: I have tried individual psychotherapy, three decades of it, family therapy, group therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, rational emotive behavior therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, hypnosis, meditation, role-playing, interoceptive exposure therapy, invivo exposure therapy, self-help workbooks, massage therapy, prayer, acupuncture, yoga, stoic philosophy, and audio tapes I ordered off a late-night TV infomercial. And he said I’ve tried medication. Lots of medications. Thorazine, Emiprimine, Dizinpramine, Chloropheneramine, [If you are a doctor, you’re loving these pronunciations!] Nardil, Busbar, Prozac, Zoloft, Paxil, Wellbutrin, Affexor, Celexa, Lexapro, Cymbalta, Luvox, Trazadone, Nevoxil, Endural, Traxine, Cynax, Centrax, St. John’s Wort, Zolpedem, Valium, Librium, Atavan, Zanax, Clonipin. I’ve also tried the whole sphere of beer, wine, gin, bourbon, vodka, scotch.

And then he said, “Here’s what worked: NOTHING!”

Now I’m all for therapies and their proper usage. I’m all for medications and their proper usage. But at some point, you learn: worry is not solved by those things. They have their place. But worry in the heart will not be solved by those things.

Robert Leahy, in his book, *Anxiety-Free: Unravel Your Fears Before they Unravel You*, said “in any given year, 18% of Americans will suffer from an anxiety disorder. That’s twice the number who suffer from depression. If you broaden the study to include anyone who experiences an anxiety disorder at any time in his or her lifetime, the number increases to nearly 30%. Our levels of anxiety have also increased dramatically over the last 50 years.” Listen to this: Leahy says in his book “The average American child of today exhibits the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient did in the 1950s. Material comfort and security may be higher than it was back then,” he writes, “but other prevailing issues like separation from extended family, loss of community and neighborhood, uncertain employment, threats of terrorism, uncertain futures, high medical costs, immersion in technology, and lack of emotional support, are a few of the many contributing factors.” As he puts it, “We live in the age of anxiety. We have become a nation of nervous wrecks.”

Jesus said that the root of all that anxiety and worry is the lack of faith and trust in Him. Because, if God really is there, and He is really good, and He really works all things together for His purposes, and He has made promises He intends to keep, then Jesus asked the question, “Why do you worry?”
It’s behind his response in verse 30, when He said, “you of little faith”. You worry because you are of little faith; you are of little trust. Jesus said, if you are living with kingdom priorities, it will be seen in how you trust, OR it will be seen in what you don’t worry about. That’s why He said in 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 than food, and the body more than clothes? 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? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 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—youth of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Matthew 6:25-32

Jesus said, why are you worrying when your worry doesn’t change anything? Or meet your needs? Why do you worry about the things you cannot acquire or hold onto without God’s help anyway? Do you honestly think that anything you have, you got on your own? Do you honestly think that you are the sole one who can decide whether you keep it, or it’s gone? God can drain your resources in a heartbeat!

Why do you worry when God knows your needs and He knows how to supply for them? Jesus said, “You worry because you don’t really trust Me. You don’t really trust My word, or My ability or My goodness. Coupled with that, you worry because you may be trying to acquire and hold onto things that God never intended you to have. Your priorities are set on things,” Jesus said, “rather than being set on the God who provides those things.” And, man! When your priority and focus is on the things, it will create a worry that will steal your devotion to God.

So, He said, “Look at the birds.” (Interesting the illustrations Jesus used when He talked to people, “Look at the birds.” They were probably flying all around Him out in the field. I’ve been to the place where He preached this sermon. It’s amazing. Still very much country. Birds all over the place.) “Look at the birds. They don’t plant, they don’t harvest, they don’t store up in barns, yet God feeds them.” Now it isn’t that the birds don’t have a part. The birds don’t just sit on their nest, open up their jaws and say, “Feed me! Feed me! Feed me!” They learn to fly, they get out, they go look, they endure the dangers, they put out the effort, they go where they have to go. But they don’t worry about it because they know the food is going to be there. It always is, it always will be. That’s how they stay alive. They go out and do their part and God supplies it. So God says, “Are you not more valuable to God than the birds?” God is the creator of the birds. God is your creator. God is not the Father of the birds, but God is your Father. Therefore, if the birds can live their lives without worry, why can’t you trust the One Who said, “I am your father and I know your needs.” So He said, “Why do you worry?”

Then He says, “Look at the flowers in the grass.” They are alive. They don’t worry. They don’t worry about what to wear. They don’t worry about anything. God knows what they need to survive, or they wouldn’t have life. And look at them! Solomon couldn’t dress like these! All the flowers and the grass
are temporary, but you are eternal! Don’t you think God is going to clothe you? Which is why Jesus concluded by telling them in verse 31, “So do not worry, saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things. But your heavenly Father knows that you need them.” The pagans, the unbelievers, the ones who do not know God or trust God, they spend their time chasing the stuff that the rest of the world chases, because they don’t see anybody else there to provide for them but themselves. “If we don’t do it, who will?” is their thought. So the pagans chase that stuff. But you don’t have to. You know God; He knows you. So don’t worry about the things God said He was going to provide. Stay faithful to God, do the work of the kingdom He has asked you to do, and all these things will be given to you as well. God knows what we need better than we do. He is committed to meet our needs and not our wants, and therein lies the issue. You seek the kingdom first, and start living for these priorities, God might rearrange your lifestyle. In fact, He probably will.

Karla and I noticed some years ago that our views of what we need were being shaped more by the world than by God. You know how we noticed it? We would watch those home improvement shows or we would go to a model home to get ideas, or we would watch and read the ads in the paper. You come home and your house looks pretty drab. And we noticed that we were going after things that on our own we never would have thought of. It was fueled by a desire, thinking, well, you’ll be better if you have ‘this’. That’s how it works. So at some point, you slow down enough to ask the questions, “Does my toilet flush? Is my house warm in the winter? Does my refrigerator keep my food preserved so I can eat it when I need to eat it? Does my car get me where I want to go? Are the clothes I’m wearing still adequate?” People, it isn’t that it’s wrong to have a new car or a new house or do a remodel or add some carpet or whatever. That’s not wrong. The question is, “Are they your priority?” Because if they are, the kingdom will not be. And everything else is going to get out of whack if you find yourself worrying about trying to hold on to what maybe God doesn’t even want you to have.

So. It says in Hebrews 13 verse 5:

5“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” 6 So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.

Keep your lives free from the love of money; be content with whatever you have. Now, I know people who have a lot of money, and I know people who have very little money. But the people I know don’t love money, and it shows by the way they manage it for kingdom things. I know people who have a lot of money, and I know people who have very little money, but they love the money and it shows by the way they manage it for kingdom things. We can’t have the kingdom as our top priority if our lives are focused on acquiring or hanging onto things that are our top priority.

So, simplifying our lives (whatever that means) and focusing our attention on the kingdom first, allows us to have what God desires to be a part of His kingdom advancement. And it all puts all of these other things in their proper place.

It’s not only seen in how we trust God, but when Christ and His kingdom are our top priority, it will be seen in what we seek. Not just in what we trust, but in what we seek. That’s our memory verse for this
week, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Karla and I were in Bakersfield visiting my daughter, son-in-law and grandkids over New Years. We went down to downtown Bakersfield, to a Woolworth store. Now Woolworth’s has been out of business for a long, long time. But in downtown Bakersfield they have kept this Woolworth store kinda like it must have been when they went out of business and locked the doors that night. It looks just like the old Woolworth stores I remember. Inside, they have a luncheonette in there, which was a part of many department stores back then, which was really smart. You come to shop. It’s a big deal to get out if you’re going to burn the gas or take the bus or walk or whatever. You might as well eat there and keep on shopping, so you don’t leave. So they had a luncheonette. This luncheonette, which is owned by a couple of guys from my son-in-law’s church, has the same equipment, the same counters, the same seats, the grill, everything from the 1940s and 50s. You would think you’re sitting in an old luncheonette from 50 – 60 years ago.

We were sitting there, having a hamburger and a hotdog (this is no health food place, I can assure you that!), and my daughter looks up on the wall. There’s this big, metal sign that says “S & H Green Stamps”. And Kelsey said, “Dad, what was that again?” And I said, “Well, back when I was a kid, …”(And my kids always put their heads down, thinking, “Why did I even ask this? – He’s going to go into a ‘now, when I was a kid’ story – we’re going to e here a while.”)

Anyway, I said, back when I was a kid, S & H (Sperry & Hutchison) green stamps, were what you got when you bought your groceries or whatever store participated. You bought your groceries and they gave you a value of stamps. You would take them home and lick ‘em and stick ‘em and put them into your book. You would save up these books, and you would look in the S & H Green Stamp Redemption Catalog and you would pick out stuff you were saving for. You’d take them down, you’d give them the books, they’d give you the stuff. It was a great deal.

I’d say when I was 9 or 10 years old, I was looking through the S & H Green Stamp Redemption Book, and I saw a bugle. I said, I gotta have this bugle. Now, I couldn’t play the bugle. Never have. Never will. But I had to have this! It was shiny and gold and my heart was set on it. So I was constantly badgering my mom, “Mom! You got stamps? You got stamps? You got stamps?” She’d give me the stamps. I’d lick them and stick them in the book. “Do I have enough books?” “No, you don’t have enough, don’t have enough, don’t have enough.” It seemed like it went on forever, “You don’t have enough.” Finally one day I asked, “Do I have enough?” “Yes, you have enough!” So I said, “Can we go? Can we go? Can we go?” Now, it was 11 miles to the redemption center from our house in New England. Eleven miles in rural Connecticut was like driving to LA in California! You don’t do it on a whim! You don’t burn the gas, you’re going to the big city (probably 10,000 people) and you – you just don’t go there without a reason. “Can I go? Can I go? Can I go?” Finally she said, “Alright, we’ll go.” I said “When are we going to go? When are we going to go?” “Tomorrow!” Well, that night it snowed! The roads were closed. So the next morning, I’m up, “Can we go, can we go, can we go?” “No we can’t go – the roads are closed.” So I kept going out. “Are the roads melting? Are they plowing? Are they sanding?” I drove my mom nuts. All I talked about was that crazy bugle. So eventually she said, “All right! Come on! We’re going to go get the bugle.” Man! I got this thing. I brought it home. Couldn’t play it. In two weeks, I was seeking something else.
Ever happen to you? Gotta have it, gotta have it, gotta have it. You get it, and in a short time, you’re on to something else. Because things don’t satisfy. But it doesn’t stop us from seeking.

You know, if you had asked anyone in my family at that time, they’d probably still remember. What was Larry seeking most? They’ll say, that stupid bugle. Because they all saw it. If you ask my family today, what is Larry seeking most? Interesting what they might tell you. I hope the answer would be, he is seeking the kingdom of God. But whatever they say, their answer will be shaped by what they see me seeking. The good thing about the kingdom is, you seek the kingdom with that same intensity, and you get a hold of it, you don’t need to worry about it not satisfying.

Jesus said, “You can’t let your lives be captivated by worrying over things that God might not even want you to have; and you need to make sure that whatever you’re seeking, the kingdom is the first on the list, and My righteousness.” He said in verse 31,

31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

That word ‘seek’ is the word for ‘pursue’, but it’s the idea of pursue so as to have it, to take hold of it, to make it your own. Jesus said make seeking God and His righteous reign in your life your top priority so that you want it, and you desire it, and you pursue it, more than any other pursuit. Other things will have their place, but this one is first in your life.

D.A. Carson, in his commentary on Matthew’s gospel, said,

This verse makes it clear that Jesus’ disciples are not simply to refrain from the pursuit of temporal things, as their primary goal in order to differentiate themselves from pagans. Instead, they are to replace such pursuits with goals of far greater significance. To seek first the kingdom of God is to desire above all else, to enter into, submit to, and participate in, spreading the news of the saving reign of God, the Messianic Kingdom, already inaugurated by Jesus, and to live so as to store up treasures in heaven in the prospect of the kingdom’s consummation. It is to pursue the things already prayed for in the first three petitions of the Lord’s prayer in Matthew 6:9, which we already mentioned.

Which were what? This is how you should then pray: Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name. (God first, then what?) Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. That’s a kingdom priority prayer that He taught. We are to seek as our top priority, His kingdom and His righteousness.

If we’re seeking His kingdom first, His righteous reign over our life, and the spread of His glory and His gospel, then it will be seen in the way that we live and the way we prioritize and actually do those things that advance that kingdom reign to the nations of the earth, beginning right at home. When we are seeking His kingdom first, we are longing to see His kingdom reign established in people’s lives, and then, filled with the Holy Spirit, to be transformed into reproducing followers of Jesus who will then join you in this kingdom advancement, for the praise of His glory. And when we’re seeking His
righteousness, it’s not seeking to be righteous apart from Christ, or seeking to work for our salvation, it’s not about that. To seek His righteousness is to pursue the life that Jesus Himself lives, with the desire to see His righteousness lived out in you and through you, as He promised He would do. It is to seek to have His righteous reign lived out in your life. Seek His kingdom and His righteousness first, as your top priority, and Jesus said, you can expect these things.

First of all, you can expect that all these things like food and clothing and all your basic needs are going to be provided at the level that God knows that you need them. Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. C.S. Lewis, in his book, *Mere Christianity*, once wrote,

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next . . . aim at Heaven and you will get earth “thrown in”; aim at earth and you will get neither.

Not only will you get your basic needs met, as God said He would meet, but if you live for the Kingdom and His righteousness first, you will also get persecution. Matthew 5:10-11:

10 *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* 11 “*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.* 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Store up your treasures in heaven, not on earth. You make Christ and His kingdom and His righteousness your top priority, and the world, led by Satan, who hates that priority, will oppose you. And when that happens, rejoice and be glad, Jesus said, you’re in good company. Jesus was treated that way. The prophets were treated that way, and so is everybody else who lives kingdom first.

When you are persecuted by a world that doesn’t want Him, you will be confirmed – you are really a kingdom person! Jesus is alive in me. “*Blessed are those who are persecuted, for theirs is the kingdom.*”

He also said, not only will your needs be met, and not only should you expect persecution, but if you live kingdom first, and seek His righteousness, you can expect that some people will be saved, and God will be glorified.

Matthew 5:14-16 14 *You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.* 15 *Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.* 16 *In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

John Stott, the great theologian once said, “In the end, just as there are only two kinds of piety, the self-centered and the God-centered, so there are only two kinds of ambition: one can be ambitious either for oneself or for God. There is no third alternative.”
When a person has the kingdom and His righteousness as their top priority, they will be found seeking and pursuing that kingdom and His reign over every area of their life. Jesus said, your real priorities will be seen in how you use your time, how you use your talents and abilities, how you use your treasure, how you use every opportunity God brings across your path.

People, living kingdom first isn’t that we don’t pay our rent, or never buy a new car, or never get a new set of clothes, or never do a remodel or get a new refrigerator, or go on a vacation, or play a round of golf, or buy a new purse or whatever. It’s not about that. Seeking the kingdom first and His righteousness says that I will seek His kingdom first, and these other things, which are gifts from God as well, will never be my priority and I will not pursue them until the kingdom goals are pursued. I will get things in the right priority.

So, from time to time, it’s a good diagnostic question to ask: when people look at my life, when God looks at my life, what would they say is my top priority? Jesus said, live in such a way that they will clearly see the kingdom of God and the glory of Christ, is your top priority. And all these other things will fit in their proper place.

Pastor Ken Cross, who wrote our excellent devotionals this week, did a really masterful job in my opinion of pointing out the priorities. (You only get five devotionals, it’s hard to cover a subject like this.) Whether you are just beginning those devotionals this week, or whether you are just ending those devotionals as you come to this Sunday, I hope you take time to look at what’s there: the priority of seeking Jesus first; he’s talking about the priority of worship; the priority of growing, and craving that growth; the priority of service; and then he ends in day five with the priority of proclaiming the gospel and seeing people come to Christ. You come away from those devotionals clearly with the idea of – when I get up in the morning, what is my priority? Is it the kingdom of earth or the kingdom of heaven?

Anyway, in the book, week two, in the introduction, he tells about a woman he met on a trip to Kenya, and, man! I haven’t been able to get this lady out of my mind. Here’s what he wrote:

Our mission team was in Kenya, driving up windy, steep mountain roads on the world’s largest free-standing mountain, Mt. Elgon. We were en route to a desolate, mud-walled church to distribute provisions. The rocky, clay roads were cluttered with activity from those who called this mountain terrain home. Town after rustic town we passed, and then I saw her. My heart was drawn to a woman whose crippling deformities caused a hunched walk, more resembling an all-fours monkey crawl than that of a human. Her arms and legs flailed about in a whirlwind, propelling her along like a hunch-backed turtle. Every movement seemed strenuous. While we drove the remaining miles to the church, my thoughts were pierced with the question of, how does a woman like this survive? Several hours passed. Church officials were encouraging us to hand out mosquito nets, and I noticed that same woman that I had seen struggling kilometers earlier, now at the church! Did she crawl the whole way? Her pastor confirmed that his woman had propelled herself by hand to this remote mountaintop church. I learned that she made this trek every time the church opened. He told me, her unquenchable thirst for God and His word propels her. I couldn’t escape the passion for God in her eyes. That impact I will never forget.
Ken asked, what are your priorities? Is God truly your treasure and the passion of your life? In great joy, do you do everything in pursuit of your relationship with Jesus? Or are there other things you treasure more?

Jesus said in Matthew 13:44-46: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

The kingdom of God, the righteous reign of Christ -- so precious to you, that once you see it, once you find it, everything else becomes second. You’ll do everything in your power to have it.

Ken reminded us, that’s what Louie Giglio once said, in answer to the question, do you want to know what your top priority is? Giglio said: “It’s easy. You simply follow the trail of your time, your affection, your energy, your money, and your allegiance. At the end of that trail you’ll find a throne; and whatever or whomever is on that throne is what’s of highest value to you.”

Who or what is on the throne of your life? A true disciple makes living for God and the kingdom their top priority. It will be seen in how they trust instead of what they worry about. It will be seen in what they seek first, in front of everything else.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:31-33

So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

When followers of Jesus really live with the kingdom as their top priority, it’s amazing what God does. He actually, through our lives, advances the reign of Jesus Christ, the very thing He promised to do.

Lord, I want to thank You for this reminder. You showed me even this week, some areas of my life where I thought they were kingdom-first, but they weren’t. It’s no wonder I have some areas of my life that are out of priority, because I haven’t gotten them in the right priority. Lord, life is like that. But You have so simplified it for us that if we will seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness, we don’t have to worry. We seek You first, and these other things fall into place. Yours is an eternal kingdom and I thank You for allowing us to see that we can invest our lives in the reign of Jesus Christ and that You’ll one day cover the earth and all the universe. And we will be with You forever. We thank You, God. In Your precious name, Amen.