

“First Priority” (First Things First Pt. 3)
(Matthew 6:33, 28:19-20)

- **Priorities**

- *Your alarm goes off, your eyes open—perhaps reluctantly. It’s a new day.* What is your first priority, without having to think? What drives you to get up and go? Our bodies have a way of setting our priorities without consulting us: when you have to use the bathroom, your first priority becomes really, really clear. When you need to eat something, when you need hydration, sleep, the priorities are very simple, aren’t they? But one of the things that makes humans different from animals is that we have this *other* part of us, this deeper part, that’s not *solely driven by instinct or physical needs*: we have a soul, a will, that operates on greater things than the natural drives of our bodies. So, let me ask again, when the alarm rings and your feet hit the floor—besides the bathroom and coffee—*what is the first priority that drives you for the day?*
- In this new season together, we’re talking about **“First Things First”**—so far, we’ve covered **First Steps and First Call**. Today, it’s about our **First Priority** and the big question is simply this: *What is our first priority as followers of Jesus and what are the things that compete with that?* You could make a case for a lot of different teachings throughout the Bible to be our “First Priority,” but if I had to pick the most all-inclusive, overarching theme I would say this: **The Kingdom of God**. Let me give you a Scripture, then we’ll pray and dive in:
 - This comes from Jesus’ most influential and lengthy sermon recorded in the Gospels, we call it “The Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew 5-7. Right in the middle, after talking about all the things we *worry about* as humans, He says: **“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt. 6:33)**
 - There it is right there, *seek first The Kingdom*. I think this one simple phrase “the Kingdom of God,” contains all the other themes you could think of for Christians to focus on. Our first priority is to *seek the Kingdom*. So, now what we need to do is figure out *what that means*.

- **The Kingdom**

- What is *The Kingdom of God*? What are we really talking about? If you study the Gospels and all the things Jesus taught, you’ll find that “The Kingdom of God” or “The Kingdom of Heaven” is basically *His favorite topic* and really, *His central message*. Again and again, both directly and indirectly, His parables and teachings point towards the Kingdom. From the moment Jesus began His public ministry, *this was His message*: **“From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’” (Matt. 4:17)** The entire Sermon on the Mount that we just mentioned is essentially a collection of teachings on how to live for the Kingdom of God. Even after His resurrection, before He ascended back to Heaven, Jesus was teaching His disciples about the Kingdom: **“After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.” (Acts 1:3)** The 4 Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) mention the Kingdom well over 100 times. Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that God’s Kingdom is our first priority. So again, *what is it?*
 - I think the easiest way to understand this big idea is found in Jesus’ prayer—the Lord’s Prayer (by the way, that’s also in the Sermon on the Mount). How does it start?
 - *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...”* If you want a simple way to think about God’s Kingdom, think of it like this: **God’s Kingdom is where God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven**. When Jesus preaches and teaches the Kingdom of God, He’s talking about *heaven on earth*. The thing is, we know from our experiences on earth, and reading world history, and watching the news, that life in this world is often *the opposite*. Life in this world is often, frankly, *“hell on earth.”* Largely because the unredeemed human heart *does not* live for God’s will.
 - We often *don’t* do the will of God. And in this present spiritual war, the devil and the powers of darkness *don’t* do the will of God. The result is that so many things on this earth, great and small, are iterations of *hell on earth* rather than heaven. We know what that looks like: wars,

sickness, death, poverty, injustice, oppression, selfishness, betrayal, abuse, lust, greed, broken homes, broken minds, broken lives. We know it. But what does *heaven on earth* look like?

- When you read about *the beginning* in Genesis 1-2, heaven and earth were not *disconnected*, they weren't *at odds*. Earth was an extension of God's glorious eternal kingdom, creation was the overflow of God's infinite love and power and joy. Humans were made to dwell in perfect, unbroken fellowship with God and each other. We were made to reflect God's reign on the earth, to live in harmony with His creation. Look at the abundance, the fullness, the beauty of the Garden of Eden—*that's heaven on earth, that's the Kingdom of God*.
- So, when you boil it all down, Jesus came to *restore* that which was created in the beginning: He came to reconcile humans and their creator, earth and heaven. Jesus, the Son of God, took on flesh, shed His blood on the cross and conquered the grave *to bring the Kingdom of God to earth* again. And in all He did, Jesus revealed the Kingdom: His teachings, His miracles, His healings. Jesus restored, forgave, healed, freed, called and transformed people to show that *in Him*, we all have free access to God's heavenly Kingdom. We live for God's Kingdom when we turn back to the Lord as our *true King* and allow Him to reign in our lives. This is what discipleship is: I receive Jesus as savior *and* Lord, and I let Him teach me the way to *really live*.
- The Good News is even better than we think: Jesus died not just to get us into heaven, but *to get heaven into us*. We're not just waiting to die! Starting right here, right now, we get to live in God's Kingdom, to seek "on earth as it is in heaven," and eagerly anticipate *the fullness of the Kingdom* when we cross that threshold to eternity.
- For now, our mission is to be disciples *and* make disciples who are living for God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. In Matthew 28 Jesus gave these marching orders, we call it the Great Commission: **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** (Matt. 28:19-20)
- The Church gets to be *an outpost of God's Kingdom, an outpost of heaven on this earth*. Think about that! We get to live in whatever place we're planted, seeking earnestly that the community around us *would begin to look more like heaven*. We get to partner with God and find situations that look *like hell on earth* and seek that, by the supernatural power of His Spirit working through us, this thing would begin to *look more like heaven*. It's why we're called to feed the hungry, care for the poor, welcome the stranger, visit the sick, lonely and imprisoned; it's why we pray for the lost and hurting and share Christ with them. We're here to look around and say, *Ok Lord, we're not done until these souls are won for you and this place looks more like heaven*.
- **Seek First**
 - *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* Seek *first*. The priority, that which comes *prior*, before anything else, first place. That word "seek" in the original New Testament Greek language is "Zeteo." An earnest, intent, purposeful seeking—*seeking in order to find*. We can look for something halfheartedly—but that's not Zeteo, that's not the seeking Jesus is talking about.
 - True confession: when my wife asks me to look for something for her, I am not always a godly, serving husband...anyone relate? She could ask me to look for something...those shoes, or keys, or sunglasses, something in the fridge, or closet, or purse, or minivan...and I *want* to be helpful, but...I've lost confidence in my ability to navigate her unique organizational system... which is different from my own...and she can tell you, more often than not: I try, I look, I come back emptyhanded or with the wrong item, and I wait for her to go find it herself, usually on the first try. *This is one of the humorous joys of marriage, am I right?*
 - But sometimes, we seek the Kingdom of God like that. That's not Zeteo, that's not seeking first, that's not living for our "first priority". Jesus is talking about *seeking to find the treasure that will absolutely change your life*. Something you've got to have. Stopping at nothing till you get it. Seeking as if your life depends on it, because *your life depends on it*.

- Paul said, **“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,”** (Rom. 12:17) The Message says, **“God’s kingdom isn’t a matter of what you put in your stomach, for goodness’ sake. It’s what God does with your life as he sets it right, puts it together, and completes it with joy.”**
- When you understand the Kingdom that Jesus came to give us free access to—the stuff of eternity here and now on this earth—perfect communion with God, healing, restoration, forgiveness, freedom, true satisfaction, abundance, faith, hope, and love—you know that *God’s Kingdom* is the greatest thing we can possibly imagine, *the greatest treasure in the universe*.
- John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement to which we belong, said: **“Singly aim at this, that God, reigning in your heart, may fill it with the righteousness above described. And indeed whosoever seeks this first, will soon come to seek this only.”** Martin Luther the great Reformer said: **“What is the creature in comparison with the Creator, and the world in comparison with God? For if all heaven and earth were mine alone, what would I have as over against God? Not as much as a little drop of water or particle of dust in comparison with the entire ocean; besides, it is such a treasure as cannot cease or diminish and become smaller; so that...it cannot be measured or comprehended by any human heart or senses...and shall I so shamefully reject and give up God and his kingdom, that I may take this dirty, deadly belly-kingdom in preference to that divine, imperishable one that gives me eternal life, righteousness, peace, joy and salvation?”**
- There is *simply no competition* when we see this rightly. But we struggle to see it rightly. That’s why we need to follow Jesus: Jesus teaches us how to see things, and live things, the right way, God’s way, according to God’s Kingdom, rather than our own dead-end ways.
- **What’s Forming You?**
 - This is the big struggle: *there are so, so many other priorities in this world that are competing with our First Priority*. We live in a time when the influence of the world feels so *inescapable*. The constant connection we have to the kingdoms of this earth flowing through our minds and hearts with all these devices—it’s shaping us into something, it’s molding us into another image, not the likeness of Christ. And it’s not just how we spend our time, it’s the real-estate of our heart that we give away. It’s impacting our walk, our children, our families. All of us are being formed by something. The question is, what’s forming you, what has the greatest influence? Is it the Way of Jesus and His Kingdom, or everything else?
 - Our biggest mistake these days is thinking *we just need to fit a little more God into our busy lives*. It doesn’t work if we treat Christ like that. He will be Lord of all, or He won’t be Lord *at all*. We’ve got to keep First Things First, to set our First Priority as His Kingdom, or ultimately, we’ll find that we don’t see the reality of His Kingdom in our lives at all.
 - Where are you right now? What’s the condition of your soul, your life with God? Is the eternal Kingdom your great treasure and aim? Your first priority? Or have you found that the world has slipped into your heart and you’re being pulled in a hundred different directions?
 - Back to that alarm clock. In his classic book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis said this: **“...the real problem of the Christian life comes where people do not usually look for it. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day...”**
 - Do you need a heart-check this morning? Remember what Jesus preached: *Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is near*. Every day we wake up, every time we hear God’s Word, it’s an opportunity to *repent and turn it all back to God*. It’s a lifelong journey, and we’re going to constantly need His grace to *course-correct*. Turn to Him today with all your heart! If you know you need that this morning, to see that the first priority of your day from the moment you wake up, the first priority of your life, the first priority of your family, is Jesus and His Kingdom, here as it is in heaven, *lift your hands high as we pray*.