

Natalie W. Bell
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Seek First the Kingdom
Matthew 6:24-33

"No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

26 Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin,

29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

31 Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?"

32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Most of us would say that ***we don't serve money, we serve God.***
Money is not our master, but God is.

So ***why is Jesus talking*** about serving money, before he says don't worry?
What's the connection—between money and worry?

First of all, We all know ***how effective*** it is to tell someone to not worry.
It's like saying don't stare at that elephant in the room—suddenly that's all you can see, right?

But Jesus gives this command, do not worry—about what you eat, or wear, or drink...because God cares for us even more than the beautiful birds and lilies.

We sure need this advice, right?

After all, we live in a **worry culture**.

There's ALWAYS something to worry about.

Since the tragedy last week,

now we're worried about safety, even in our churches!

We can worry all day long, about any number of things.

Sometimes it feels like we are hardwired to worry, to think of the 'what ifs', to be anxious about the present, and the future.

But Jesus says this:

Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?"

32 *For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*

33 *But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Don't serve money.

Don't worry.

Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and God will provide.

How does this **work**?

Well, let's think about what it would mean to **serve money**—when money is on your mind, what usually comes with it?

Worry.

Why? Because most of us are not billionaires.

And even they seem to think that they don't have quite enough.

When we are thinking about money,

we are **usually worrying** about what we don't have,

what we wish we had,

or what we're going to do with what we have, right?

Money=worry, for most people.

I know it can for me.

Ed's trying to finish an expensive degree right now, so we know about money worries. We've had mounting medical bills, so we are definitely feeling a cash strap.

What about you?

Does money=worry to you?

And where does our worry ***come from?***

According to Jesus, ***it's not from God.***

God is the one who provides for every need.

With God, ***we don't need to worry.***

Easier said than done, right?

So Jesus gives us something to do ***instead*** of worry.

Kind of like replacing a bad habit with a good habit.

Jesus gives us a ***choice*** of how to live.

We can worry, ***OR*** we can seek the kingdom of God.

Jesus was smart.

He knows our ***tendency to worry about*** money,

He also knows the ***solution*** to our money worries.

Seek first the kingdom of God!

But what is God's ***kingdom?***

It's what ***Jesus preached*** about the most,

It's mentioned over 119 times in the gospels.

In so many ways the kingdom of God is the ***opposite of the world.***

The kingdom is ***who God is***, and ***what God is doing.***

It's ***God's way of living***,

the realm where ***mercy, and love, grace, and peace*** reign—
where ***forgiveness*** is found.

It's a place we enter into when we ***repent*** (or turn around),

When we change our thinking,

and start seeing life from God's perspective.

It's a place of ***abundance and generosity.***

The kingdom is where ***Jesus invites*** us to join him, now and forever.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew usually uses the phrase **kingdom of heaven** to talk about God's kingdom, except here in Matthew 6. It's God's kingdom Jesus announces in Matthew 4:17 when he says, *repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.* In Matthew 9:35 Jesus proclaims *the good news of the kingdom.* And in Matthew 13, 22, and 25 Jesus tells **10 different stories** about the kingdom of heaven.

So what is it? I think it's **so foreign** to us, so different from our way of life, that Jesus uses **parables** to describe it.

The Matthew 13 stories may be familiar. The first parable is about the **Sower and the Seed...** and Jesus says the seed is the **word** of the kingdom of God. It has to take root in the good soil for it to flourish and produce good fruit.

The next story is about the **weeds and the wheat**, and Jesus says the good seed is the children of the kingdom, who will be separated from the weeds when the king comes back again.

Then there are some wonderful stories about the kingdom being like a tiny **mustard seed** that grows into one of the largest shrubs, or a little bit of **yeast** that leavens all the flour as the woman kneads. The kingdom is compared to a **treasure** in a field, or a fine **pearl**, and someone sells everything they have to get this treasure.

At the end of Matthew 13, it says the kingdom is like a **net of fish**, where the good are eventually separated from the bad.

That theme of **separating the good and the bad** continues in Matt 22 and 25. In Matthew 22:1-14 the kingdom is like a king who gave a **lavish wedding banquet**. But the invited guests all refuse to come, so the king invites everyone out on the street to the feast.

In Matthew 25:1-13, the kingdom is compared to **10 bridesmaids** who are prepared to meet the bridegroom, but only 5 are wise with plenty of oil as they wait to meet him, the other 5 are foolish and haven't come prepared. The

celebration continues without the foolish maids while they go out to buy more oil, and the door to the wedding banquet is closed.

In Matthew 25:14-30 we have the famous **parable of the talents**, where a master entrusts to his three slaves, great sums of money (after all, a talent was equal to 15 years of daily wages!) to be used while he is away.

The **first** receives 5 talents and he goes out and trades and makes 5 more.

The **second** slave receives 2 talents, and he goes and does likewise.

The **third** slave takes his 1 talent and buries it into the ground.

Do you **remember** what happens when the master returns?

The first two servants are rewarded with the great **joy** of the master,

while the third one is chastised for not using his great gift, and he is sent to **outer darkness**. Wow.

So the kingdom is amazing, and overflowing, and gracious—but it's something we **choose**—people choose to embrace God's way of life, right?

We **choose** to come to the banquet, to meet the bridegroom, to increase our talents....

The word kingdom in Greek, basileia,

means an **empire subject to a king**, a royal power, royal rule, or dominion.

So the kingdom of God is where **God is in control (not us)**.

But it's also **bigger than a place**, right?

The kingdom is **who God is, and what God is doing**.

Now we're starting to understand why Jesus talks about how we can't serve both money and God.

We have to choose.

And all too often **money is our master**, right?

It's what we think about even more than God sometimes!

But in the kingdom, **God is the master**,

and the kingdom of God is a great treasure,

an unexpectedly generous gift and invitation,

it's a feast, an opportunity to receive the joy of the Lord.

In the kingdom, there is always more than enough for those who follow the king.

In contrast, our **world is ruled by money**,

and permeated with the idea of *scarcity*.

We are bombarded with images telling us we don't have enough...

Not enough time, money, house, car, clothes, toys, face cream...you name it.

Resources are limited, even scarce.

So if you land here on earth as an alien, and watch any media,

you'll be thinking that you need all kinds of things that money can buy, and if you don't buy them, you'll miss out!

The kingdom of God is ***abundance***,

The kingdom of the world is ***scarcity***.

Which one do we want to live in?

The kingdom of God also has its ***own math***.

In the world, there is only so much to go around.

Limited resources.

Kind of like when you are ordering something online and it says in red "only 4 more in stock—order today!".

Or you listen to the commercial with the special offer that is only for the first 20 customers who call in right now!

In the world, when we give something away—we have less, right?

What if God's kingdom has different calculations?

The world says give, and you'll have less.

God says give, and you'll have so much more.

Because with God, blessings multiply.

Let's take love, for instance.

The kingdom of God is overflowing with God's love.

Consider this, let's say you have a ***child***, whom you love.

But when you have another child, does that mean your love gets split in half?

No—in fact, your ***love seems to multiply***, doesn't it?

That's how it is in the kingdom of God—it's a ***different economy***.

The ***kingdom of God is overflowing***

with love, mercy, grace, salvation, and deliverance.

When Jesus says to seek first the kingdom of God,

it means we are seeking a completely different world, where **God is in charge**, where **giving** is our calling, where **blessings abound**.

And what about **his righteousness**?

That word **righteousness in Greek** would take us several words in English to really translate. It means *integrity, purity, virtue, rightness, right relationship*.

The kingdom of God is full of righteousness.

In Psalm 37:5-6 it says:

Commit your way to the LORD (in other words seek 1st);

trust in him and he will do this:

He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn,

the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

So, when we seek **God's kingdom**,

we are seeking righteousness,

a new way of living, **a life of goodness, virtue, integrity, love, generosity.**

Loving and Giving is the way of life in the kingdom!

Mary Frances drew my attention to some incredible verses in **Hosea 10:12**:

'Plant the good seeds of righteousness, and you will harvest a crop of love. Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and shower righteousness upon you.'

Isn't that beautiful?

Mary Frances was telling me about her Hebrew class and the deeper meaning of **righteousness**, which is **salvation, deliverance, and acts of loving kindness**.

When we plant that, when we seek that, what do we get?

We get a harvest of love, and God's righteousness rains down on us!

Amazing, right?

So **how do we seek** the kingdom of God and his righteousness?

How do we find God's realm, God's way of living, that generosity, growth, new life, priceless treasure?

We GIVE. we **make commitments to give**, of our time, talent, money, and resources.

When we give, We're seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
 Because Giving is the essence of God—God is a Giver.
 And we're not seeking kingdom of this world and the reign of money,
 We're seeking a life of **abundance**, not scarcity.

When we look for the kingdom of God,
 when we place our trust in God's rule and reign,
 Our math no longer applies.
We give, and we receive far more than we ever gave.
We give, and blessings overflow.

Is this a prosperity message? A formula?

Not at all. Nowhere does Jesus say seek the kingdom and you'll be rich.
 Jesus says all these things will be given to you—things like food, drink,
 clothing... when we seek God,
 God provides what we need.
 Not everything we want, but what we need.
 There's a difference, right?

And ***our giving enables those without to have what they need.***
 We are the hands and feet of Christ—
 so giving to God means giving to one another,
 and being satisfied with what we have been given.
 It's called contentment.

An ancient Greek philosopher once said:

Contentment comes not so much from great wealth as from few wants.
 Epictetus, circa AD 100

Paul wisely reminds us:

*Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment;
 for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it;
 but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these...*

Christian author Philip Yancey wrote about seeking contentment.
 He remembers a spiritual seeker
 who interrupted his busy life to spend a few days in a monastery.
 "I hope your stay is a blessed one," said the monk who showed the visitor to
 his cell. "If you need anything, let us know,

and we'll teach you ***how to live without it.***" Philip Yancey, "What 147 Elk Taught Me About Prayer," Christianity Today (March 2006).

Talk about freedom!

Seeking the kingdom of God brings ***freedom from too many 'wants'!***

You know, when Jesus spoke about money
(which was his 2nd most popular topic!),
he always spoke about our ***need to GIVE.***

To make '***eternal purses***' instead of storing up our treasures on earth.

He spoke about ***giving sacrificially***, like the poor widow who gave her two coins. He spoke about ***sharing***, not hoarding or collecting.

He told us to give to God ***what belongs to God***—which is basically everything!

See, it seems that when we seek the kingdom, when we trust in God,
when we give and we don't even know how we can give,
that's when we ***see the abundance*** of God, the overflowing blessings.
It's the ***opposite*** of the world's economy.

It's ***not a formula*** at all, it's just what Jesus promised, that, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" Acts 20:35

Giving is the way we ***show trust in God***—the greatest giver.

Giving is the way we show ***whom we will serve.***

To love and to give is the way to truly live!

So---Who will we ***serve***? Who will we ***trust***?

Who is our ***master***?

Where will we find our sense of ***control and comfort***?

Will it be ***money***?

Because if that's the case, we're in for some serious ***worry and anxiety.***

Or will it be ***God***?

Because if that's the case, there is always going to be enough, not just enough,
but ***enough to give*** from what we have been given!

Today, we can bring ***pledges for next year***,
not because we know what the future holds,
but because we know ***who holds*** our future!

Friends, hear the ***Good News*** of the Gospel
Anything we ***want***...we can learn to live without,
And anything we ***need***...***God can provide***.
We can be **free from worry**,
when we seek the kingdom and his righteousness.
There we find joy, and abundant life,
In simple living and generous giving.
Amen.