

Sermon 40, The Christian's Top Priority, Matthew 6:33

FB teaser: Which of these pie charts represents your life? Which one provides the right conceptual framework for thinking about how to seek God's Kingdom and righteousness? Join us this Sunday at 10 AM for a sermon on Matthew 6:33, as we talk about how all of life must be done for the sake of the Kingdom.

Dan Doriani's Outline

- I. Seek the King
- II. Pray for the Kingdom
- III. Evangelize
- IV. Obey the King
- V. Work in a Kingdom Way, a Way Pleasing to God
- VI. Seek Social Reform
- VII. Pursue Righteousness in Public Places and Distant Lands — and at Home

- I. The Christian's First Goal: God's **Rule**
 - A. Intensively: More Obedience to God's Rule
 1. Individually
 2. Institutionally
 - a) As Families
 - b) As Churches
 - c) As Businesses
 - d) As Societies
 - B. Extensively: More Subjects of God's Rule
 1. Individually
 - a) Prayer
 - b) Evangelism
 2. Institutionally
 - a) Church Planting
 - b) Discipling the Nations
- II. The Christian's Second Goal: God's **Righteousness**
 - A. Justification: God's Righteousness as Gift
 - B. Sanctification: God's Righteousness as Task
- III. The Christian's Task: **Seek** God's Rule
 - A. Be Absorbed in Searching
 - B. Exert a Persevering and Strenuous Effort to Obtain
- IV. The Christian's Priority: Seeking God's Rule **First**
 - A. A Priority Is Literally "Something Done First"
 - B. Making God's Kingdom Your Priority

1. Your Daily Goal: More Obedience, More Subjects
2. Achieving that Goal
 - a) Use a Schedule
 - b) Put God into Your Schedule First
 - c) Don't Think that the Rest of the Day Is Yours
 - d) Your Whole Day Is God's
 - e) Always Ask: "Does This Activity Further God's Kingdom?"

V. The Christian's Reward

- A. The Kingdom: Righteousness, Peace, and Joy, Rom. 14:17
- B. **"All These Things:"** Material Goods

Proposition: The Christian must prioritize obedience to and expansion of God's rule over every other goal of his life.

A Christian brother named Gary Thomas is writer-in-residence at Second Baptist Church down in Houston. A few years back, he wrote a book on finding a marriage partner, and in that book he said, "The mysterious version I'm looking for, the one I see so many people following and memorizing, goes something like this: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, *except when you're choosing someone to marry. In that case, you should follow your emotions, insist on a thrilling romantic attraction and overall relational compability that makes the relationship fun, and then all these things will be added unto you.*"³

Are any of you reading that version right now? Do you see any exception clause in your text? I hope not. You shouldn't, because Jesus didn't mention any such exception. Instead, He wants us to pursue God's Kingdom and righteousness first. Period. Even when we're looking for a spouse, or fixing fence, or writing an essay, or castrating a calf. This command doesn't have any exceptions. It goes across the board, for all of us. We talked a little bit about it last Sunday, but clearly, anything Jesus tells us must be our top priority is something pretty important. So we are going to zoom in this morning on the command to seek first God's Kingdom and righteousness. What I hope to show you is simply this: you must prioritize obedience to and expansion of God's rule over every other goal of your life.

I. The Christian's First Goal: God's Rule

Seek first God's Kingdom. What is God's Kingdom? Again, it's an activity, not a place. It is best phrased as simply God's rule. You are supposed to be seeking God's rule, His rule over everything and everyone exercised everywhere. Now, how do you do this? Well, we will spend the rest of the sermon talking about that. First of all, you must seek God's rule intensively.

A. Intensively: More Obedience to God's Rule

³ *The Sacred Search* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 21-22.

That is, you must seek greater obedience to that rule. If I were to seek a particular coach to run my team, would it be because I wanted my players to do their own thing? Of course not! It would be because I wanted my players to obey the commands of that coach. I would be seeking the rule of that coach by seeking to have him come work for me and tell my team what to do.

1. Individually

The first place this kind of seeking of obedience to God's rule has to begin is with you personally as an individual. If you are seeking God's rule, then you will be seeking to be more obedient to His rule. If I say, "I want Gary Kubiak to coach me," and then when he says "run left" I run right, do I really want Kubiak's coaching? Of course not! And in the same way, if you say you want God's Kingdom, but don't want to submit to His rules, then you aren't really seeking the Kingdom at all.

So, before anything else, if you are really seeking the Kingdom you will seek to submit to the rule God exercises over your life. You will seek to obey His commandments and do His will.

2. Institutionally

But you will not be content to be holy all by yourself. If you really want to submit to God's rule, then you will endeavor to make the institutions in which you participate more obedient to God as well.

a) As Families

Thus, if you are seeking God's kingdom, you will be seeking to have your entire family obey His rules better. You will want your children to know God, to enjoy worshipping God, to memorize Scripture, to obey their parents and not tell lies or steal. You will do everything you can to help your family be the kind of family God wants it to be. That kind of family is described in Ephesians 5 and 6, and in Colossians 3 and 4. God tells us what obedient family life ought to look like!

b) As Churches

As a church, too, if we are seeking God's kingdom, then that means that we are eager to submit to His rules. We want to obey God's rule; we want to carry on our worship and witness and fellowship as a body of believers in accordance with how God says to do it. Again, we have a wealth of Biblical material on how Godly churches behave. Look at Ephesians 4, or 1 Thessalonians 1. These passages, among many others, tell us what a church that submits to Christ's rule will look like.

c) As Businesses

If you are seeking to be subject to God's rule, then you will apply that to your business practices. You will refuse to lie, steal, or profane God's holy day by working. You will treat your employees humanely, not brutally. You will encourage your subordinates to exercise their authority and make and own decisions, and you will back them up rather than micro-managing them. We would do all this because God tells us His law to treat others as we would want to be treated.

d) As Societies

Finally, in terms of gaining greater obedience to God's commands, we should work to make our entire society more obedient to God. This includes things like laws against theft and murder, and a requirement that the laws apply equally to every person. In our day, it is also fashionable to equate the Kingdom of God with environmental regulations, wealth redistribution, healthcare coverage, and so on. While it is true that when Jesus Christ's rule is consummated, when the Kingdom comes in all its fullness, everyone will have enough, the Earth will flourish undamaged by sin, and no one will be sick, be skeptical of claims that say obedience to God requires these conditions of us right now. The reason that everyone will have enough is because God will grant it; everyone will be healthy because God will heal them all; the Earth will flourish because God will cleanse it and remove His curse from it. These things will not and cannot happen in their fullness through any human agency. Beware, then, of any attempt to cast government or human society in the role of Messiah. We must strive to make our state more obedient to God, but not to make it more godlike in its role, powers, and honors.

B. Extensively: More Subjects of God's Rule

Well, not only will seeking God's rule mean greater personal and institutional obedience to God. It will also mean a greater number of people and institutions submitting to Him.

1. Individually

How do we as individuals seek to bring more subjects under God's rule?

a) Prayer

The first way is by prayer. As we saw a few months ago, praying for God's Kingdom to come means that we are asking for additional people, institutions, and nations to be brought under His rule. Do you pray for conversions? Do you pray that unsaved friends, relatives, co-workers, and acquaintances would come to know Jesus Christ? If not, then you are not seeking God's Kingdom — not, at any rate, in its fullness.

b) Evangelism

But in addition to praying, you must also speak about the kingdom. Invite people to church. Cultivate relationships with those who do not know Christ so that you will be able to tell them the hope that is in you. If you are truly full of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, you will look a lot different than the typical worldly person. Don't try to hide that difference. Let it be seen. Pray for people to ask. Pray for people to invite to church. Pray for your neighbors and get to know them. Brothers and sisters, we all interact with unbelievers. Are you seeking to tell them the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord, that God reigns, that a way of reconciliation with God is available to those who put their trust in Christ?

2. Institutionally

But secondly, if you really are seeking God's Kingdom, then you will be seeking to bring additional institutions under its sway. While this overlaps to some degree with greater intensity of submission to God in institutions, as above, it is best seen in the extension of the church.

a) Church Planting

Every time a church is planted, God's Kingdom is extended just a bit farther. His rule is exercised over a few more people. Do you seek church planting? How can you do so? By giving money to church planters and praying for their work. By faithfully supporting your own church, and working to bring new people to Christ in it. In certain cases, God might call you to be a church planter, whether through an internal desire or through extraordinary circumstances. This church was not planted by anyone with a distinct calling to plant churches. It was planted by a family who wanted a Reformed church but lived more than 100 miles from the nearest one. That was a call issued by God through the circumstances, and over the course of almost a decade, Harvest came to be. Our church stands as an outpost of God's Kingdom here in Gillette, Wyoming.

b) Discipling the Nations

Ultimately, we as a church — as *the* church — will make disciples of all nations. That is the commission Jesus gave His disciples and ultimately His church. That is the endgame, the consummation of His plan. When the nations have become disciples of Jesus Christ, in the full sense of the words, then truly the kingdoms of this world will have become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ. Do you pray for this? Do you want this to happen? Is the discipling of nations something you would like to see happen, even though you know it's a task too big for any one person or church? It should be. If you are seeking the Kingdom, then will be!

II. The Christian's Second Goal: God's Righteousness

Jesus doesn't stop at seeking God's rule. He says that we must also seek God's righteousness. How do we do that? We ask Him for it. And we attempt to embody it.

A. Justification: God's Righteousness as Gift

In other words, the first way to seek God's righteousness is to ask Him to grant you Christ's righteousness, free gratis. If you are already a believer, then this righteousness is yours. Paul says that it is "to all" and "upon all who believe." Justification is yours if you trust in Jesus. You've already shown yourself to be a seeker of righteousness.

B. Sanctification: God's Righteousness as Task

But the second way to seek God's righteousness is by seeking to grow in holiness. In this case, God's righteousness is still a gift, whereby His Holy Spirit conforms you to the image of His Son. But it is also a task; you have to work to grow more like Jesus. Do you want righteousness? Do you seek righteousness? Then you should be growing holier. Your righteousness should be increasing, slowly, perhaps, but nonetheless surely.

III. The Christian's Task: Seek God's Rule

Well, now you know what God's Kingdom and righteousness are. Your task is this: to *seek* that Kingdom and righteousness.

A. Be Absorbed in Searching

To seek is first of all to be absorbed in searching. In Sunday School a few months ago, we talked about looking through a gigantic Lego collection for that one particular brick. If you are absorbed in searching, then you're actively thinking about searching. You're not devoting about

90% of your mental energy to thinking about the playoffs of your favorite team; you're thinking with your whole mind about that thing you're trying to find. Does this sound like the way you search for the Kingdom? Is this the kind of seeking you engage in when you desire to come more fully under God's rule and bring more people under that rule with you?

B. Exert a Persevering and Strenuous Effort to Obtain

Why, though, would you look so hard? The answer is, has to be, that you want to find what you're looking for. You don't spend lots of energy looking for something you don't want. My mom likes to tell about the time her dad received a check for tens of thousands of dollars. The clean-up crew (that is, one of his daughters) swept it up and threw it in the trash, not knowing what it was. Well, when Grandpa got home from work, he removed everything from the dumpster, opened all the bags of trash, looking for that check. We understand that it would be worth it to systematically sort through the dumpster when you lost a check like that. But none of us has ever torn apart the dumpster in search of last week's potato peelings, or last week's newspaper bag. Why not? Because those things aren't worth obtaining. But the Kingdom is worth obtaining. Being fully submitted to Christ's rule, and having the privilege of living under that rule, is worth all the effort we can put into it.

IV. The Christian's Priority: Seeking God's Rule First

That is why Jesus tells us to seek the Kingdom "first."

A. A Priority Is Literally "Something Done First"

We all talk about priorities, and by them we mean figuratively the things which are most important to us and literally the things we do first. If something is going to fall through the cracks, it's the thing we're putting off for later. But if it is something important to us, we do it immediately, to make sure that it happens. So, for most of us, the top priority of the day is getting out of bed. We do this thing first, before we do anything else with our day. Why? Because getting out of bed is a prerequisite to accomplishing everything else we want to do. Then, most of us prioritize getting to work. If it's work or the dishes, we choose work. If it's work or vacuuming the car, we choose work. And so on.

B. Making God's Kingdom Your Priority

Well, Jesus teaches us that God's Kingdom should be our top priority — even more important than getting to work, more important than getting out of bed, is getting to the place where you are fully submitted to Christ individually, where the institutions in which you participate are fully submitted to Him as institutions, and where more people and institutions are becoming subject to Him.

1. Your Daily Goal: More Obedience, More Subjects

In short, then, according to Jesus, the most important thing, your goal for every day of your life, has to ultimately be more obedience to Jesus and more subjects for Jesus. What do I hope to achieve today? I hope to achieve greater obedience than I did yesterday. I hope to see more people serving Jesus today than I saw yesterday.

That is the literal meaning of seeking first God's Kingdom and righteousness. Does it sound a little scary? When you're thinking about vacuuming the car, what is your goal in doing that activity? To have a clean car, you might say. But why do you want a clean car? Because it's more pleasant and safer to be in a clean car. But why are pleasant surroundings and safety desirable? Because they are good. And who decides that they are good? Well, God has implanted in us the knowledge that they are good. According to God, order and safety are good. Those things that are of God are well ordered, as Thomas Aquinas always liked to paraphrase Romans 13:1. So why do you vacuum the car? Ultimately, because in doing so you can imitate God. You can show that the rule of Jesus is well-ordered in your personal life and activities.

In fact, since God is a God of order, not confusion, we can talk further about *how* to make the pursuit of God's Kingdom a reality in our lives. How do you get to the place where you have truly prioritized those things?

2. Achieving that Goal

a) Use a Schedule

First of all, you must plan your life if you want to seek the Kingdom. I can promise you that you will never find the Kingdom by accident. So use a schedule. It doesn't have to be written, but it does have to be done. You need to decide up front how you are going to spend your days, weeks, months, and years. What will you do between now and the end of the year? Between now and the end of your life? If you don't know, then I suggest that you will probably not glorify God by what you do.

b) Put God into Your Schedule First

Secondly, though "priority" literally means "done first," the real secret is that priorities must be *scheduled* first. You can't come to church before you get out of bed. You can't get out of bed before you wake up. But you can plan first and foremost on coming to church, and work backward from that to "I need to eat at 8:05, which means I need to get up at 7, which means I need to go to bed at 10, which means that I can't go out to this and that on Saturday night." You can put family worship every evening into your schedule, and then say, "If we are going to worship God and deliberately seek Him as a family at 7 PM daily, then we need to generally be home, not at the game, track meet, swim meet, restaurant, etc., at that hour."

You know what I'm talking about. Clearly scheduling is no mystery to you all; if it were, you wouldn't be here and you wouldn't be holding down a job. So, beloved, I urge you to obey the command of Christ. Put time with God into your schedule first! Make the rest of your activities give way to private worship, family worship, and corporate worship. Say, "If I go to prayer meeting then I can't participate in x, y, and z — and that's okay, because I want to seek to exert effort to seek greater obedience to Jesus more than I want x, y, and z!"

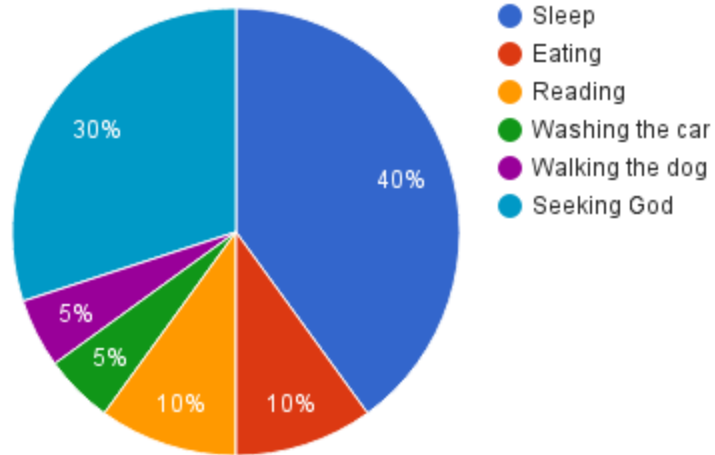
c) Don't Think that the Rest of the Day Is Yours

But once you've put God into your schedule, have you done what you need to do to seek God's Kingdom and righteousness? Can you say, "Well, good. All of that is done, and now the rest of the day is mine"? No!

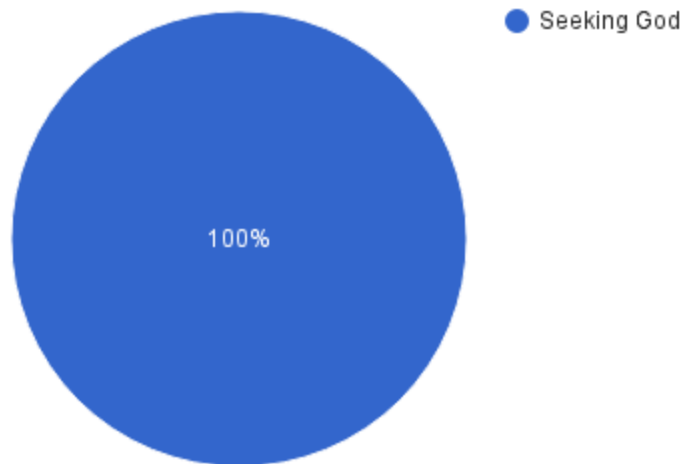
d) Your Whole Day Is God's

Think in terms of a pie chart with me here.

My Time



My Time



Which of these two charts gives the correct way to think about your time? Is it okay if you spend 30% of your time seeking God, and the rest on doing other things that you need to do to live? Not really. The way Jesus talks, we need to think in terms of the second pie. Your entire life belongs to God, and everything you do has to come back, in some sense, to seeking God, obeying God, imitating God, or walking with God. Get the first chart out of your head. The point is not that God gets the biggest slice of your life, and then you can do the rest of what you do for other reasons.

e) Always Ask: “Does This Activity Further God’s Kingdom?”

Practically, then, you need to ask, “Does this activity further God’s Kingdom? Is the ultimate reason for doing this thing either to obey Christ or to bring others to greater obedience to Him?” If not, then that activity needs to go. I don’t say, and Jesus didn’t say, that the proximate reason for doing everything has to be God’s Kingdom. You don’t have to pick up your room because of God’s Kingdom — and yet you do. You have to pick up your room because God’s Kingdom is an orderly place, and because you are being obedient to Christ when you live an orderly life. You have to make dinner because God has given you life on this earth and told you to use all lawful means to maintain your life. Nonetheless, the life is for the sake of knowing God, and the dinner is for the sake of the life — and thus, the dinner is ultimately for the sake of knowing God.

So as you make your schedule, as you decide how to spend your time, ask yourself whether the activity you’re thinking of putting on the schedule furthers or hinders your obedience to Jesus. Ask yourself whether you are growing in personal and institutional obedience to God.

V. The Christian’s Reward

And when you live that way, Jesus says, you will receive a rich reward.

A. The Kingdom: Righteousness, Peace, and Joy, Rom. 14:17

God’s Kingdom isn’t food and drink, says Paul. It’s not shrimp and wine, or any other combination of luxury goods. It is a spiritual Kingdom with spiritual benefits, especially these three: righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. So don’t worry about foods. Do millions of people have enough food and drink, but completely lack righteousness, peace, and joy? You’d better believe it. Just turn on the TV. You’ll see them.

B. “All These Things:” Material Goods

But Jesus doesn’t make it an either-or. He doesn’t say, “Serve me and you’ll have to starve to death and die of thirst, but you’ll have so much righteousness, peace, and joy that you won’t even care!” He says, “Serve me and in addition to righteousness, peace, and joy, I’ll give you food, clothing, and drink.”

Can you believe this gift? As C.S. Lewis put it, “Aim at Heaven and you’ll get Earth thrown in.” Jesus promises to provide for you, if you only seek Him, prioritizing His Kingdom and righteousness above everything else. O, brothers and sisters, believe it! Seek that Kingdom. Seek that righteousness. All these other things will be added to you. Amen.