

# First Things First

**Text:** Matthew 6:19-34

## Introduction:

1. Context: These verses are a part of Christ's Sermon on the Mount (See 5:1 & 8:1). In the first section of this chapter, Christ rebukes the hypocrisy of external religion that is performed for the praise of men in three areas: Giving (1-4); Prayer (5-15) and Fasting (16-18)
2. Challenge: These verses contain a heart-stirring challenge concerning the need for us to put Christ first in all things as His disciples. Our lives are not to be consumed with the things of this world but rather with the things of Christ.
3. In the text we can discern three principles that are to govern our lives.

## I. The Priority for our Lives (Focus) (Vs. 19-24)

### A. Investment Priorities (Vs. 19-20)

1. An investment to Avoid (Vs. 19)
  - a. "lay up" = means to store or treasure up. Refers to the process of amassing and accumulating possessions. These words speak of "energy and effort".
  - b. Christ adds weight to the command by highlighting the temporary nature of earthly possessions. They are subject to:
    - i. *Corruption* – "moth and rust doth corrupt" The moth lays its eggs in woolens which the larvae use for their food, thus spoiling the garment. The rust corrodes and eats away at precious metals.
    - ii. *Crime* – "thieves break through and steal" Picture is of thieves digging through the mud walls of the houses in Christ's day to steal. Even if you are able to slow down the corruption process with your riches, they can still be stolen!
    - iii. The riches of this world do not last! Prov. 23:5 "*Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? **for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.***" Ecc. 5:11 "*When goods increase, **they are increased that eat them:** and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with the eyes?"*
  - c. Sadly, many of the Lord's disciples are entangled in the snare of materialism. Materialism according to the dictionary is a "preoccupation with or emphasis on material objects, comforts and considerations, with a disinterest in or rejection of spiritual, intellectual and cultural values."

2. An investment to Accrue (Vs. 20)
  - a. “in heaven” = we are to make heavenly riches a priority in our lives. This is where we are to focus our energies and efforts.
  - b. Heavenly treasures are moth-proof, rust proof and burglar proof!
  - c. “Only one life so soon it will pass, only what’s done for Christ will last.”

**B. Insight on Priorities (Vs. 21)**

1. The reason underpinning the exhortation is given in this verse. Your affections will be bound up in what you invest your time and energies into.
2. The ‘heart’ speaks of the center of a man’s life, the seat of his affections. It refers to “the whole inner man...thoughts, purposes...are all included in the word.” (Maclaren)
3. Note: God’s Word is not teaching us that we are to be idle and not work. Slothfulness is soundly condemned in God’s Word. God holds husbands and fathers responsible to provide for their families. But having a job as a means to a spiritual end is different to an approach to life that is consumed with material things. Christ is concerned with what has our hearts and our focus. When our affections are set on “things above” and that is our focus and goal, we will approach the things of earth in a totally different spirit to those who set their affections on “things of earth” (Col. 3:1-3)

**C. Illustrations of Priorities (Vs. 22-24)**

In both of these illustrations Christ further emphasizes the two ways of living as a disciple. There is no middle ground in this! You are in either one of the two categories.

1. Illustration of Sight (Vs. 22-23)
  - a. The Pure Eye (Vs. 22)
    - i. ‘single’ = means “pure; simple’ incorrupt; unbiased; having clear vision of divine truth” (Webster 1828). A healthy eye results in clear, undistorted vision.
    - ii. The ‘single’ eye is the eye that is focused on eternal riches. What is the condition of your spiritual eyesight?
  - b. The Perverse Eye (Vs. 23)
    - i. ‘evil’ = means “wicked; corrupt; sinful.” A diseased eye results in darkness and distorted vision
    - ii. The ‘evil’ eye is the eye that is focused on temporal things. To be focused on earthly things rather than heavenly things is evil and wicked in the sight of our Lord Jesus Christ and results in a distorted view of life. You aren’t seeing things clearly!
2. Illustration of Servanthood (Vs. 24)
  - a. An absolute statement – “no man can serve two masters...ye cannot” Christ draws a line in the sand. There is no middle

ground. You can only truly love and serve ONE master and a **choice** must be made. If Christ said we can't serve both then why do we think we can! You can either serve the True God or the temporal god. When we make the things of this earth first place in our lives, eventually we will resent and despise the things of God. You can't be worldly and spiritual at the same time!

- b. 1 Timothy 6:6-12 "But godliness with contentment is great gain..." Rather than pursuing riches we are to FLEE, FOLLOW AND FIGHT
- c. Illustration: Demas is a reminder that love for the world eventually leads to backsliding and straying from God (2. Tim. 4:10)
- d. Question: How many of you believe that God should have first place in your life as a Christian?
- e. Challenge: While we believe that in theory, is it reflected in **PRACTICE** in our lives? E.g. personal daily priorities (e.g. walk with God; entertainment choices); family priorities (e.g. financial choices; local church commitment)

## II. The Perspective for our Lives (Faith) (Vs. 25-30, 34)

### A. The Exhortation to Faith (Vs. 25, 34)

- 1. The attitude of faith (Vs. 25a)
  - a. 'therefore' = Exhortation is based on the preceding instruction. Christ brings the challenge closer to home as He deals not just with our overall approach to life in our priorities (Vs. 19-24) but also our attitude to the basic necessities of life.
  - b. "take no thought" = the phrase "take thought" occurs 6 times in Vs. 25-34 so it is vital we understand what it means.
    - i. What it DOES NOT mean: It does not mean we are to be careless and thoughtless and not give due attention to the orderly and wise management of our resources (See Prov. 27:23-24).
    - ii. What it DOES mean: We are not to be anxious or worried about our daily needs. We are not to allow them to consume us. The word 'thought' in old English in this context meant 'anxiety' or "anxious care" (Zodhiates). The same Greek word is translated 'careful' in Philippians 4:6 ("Be careful for nothing...") and in Luke 10:41 (Christ's words to Martha).
- 2. The areas for faith (Vs. 25b, 34)
  - a. Food
  - b. Clothing

- c. Future (Vs. 34)
- 3. The argument for faith (Vs. 25c)
  - a. Life is so much more than food and drink (bodily needs)! How many truly precious and wonderful things we miss in life due to our preoccupation with earthly things.
  - b. Christ is our life (Col. 3:3; Phil. 1:21). “Thou Oh Christ art all I want, more than all in thee I find” (Wesley)

## B. The Encouragements to Faith (Vs. 26-29)

Christ gives three illustrations to further drive home the point:

1. The illustration of birds – Look up! (Vs. 26)
  - a. This illustration addresses the issue of food. Birds are industrious and busy (not idle) but they live a life of day to day dependence.
  - b. If our Heavenly Father cares for His creatures, how much more will He care for us as His children who are of so much more value to Him. Christ argues from the lesser to the greater.
2. The illustration of height – Look within! (Vs. 27)
  - a. Question: Can you make yourself taller by thinking? Of course not! You can fret, worry and ponder all you like but it will not give you a greater height. So much for the power of positive thinking!
  - b. Implication: Worry and anxiety over the necessities of life accomplishes NOTHING. We are called as Christ’s disciples to a life of simple faith and trust in our Heavenly Father.
  - c. Psalm 37:25 *“I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.”*
3. The illustration of flowers – Look around! (Vs. 28-30)
  - a. This illustration addresses the issue of clothing. If God adorns the grass of the fields with beautiful wild flowers (e.g. lilies), how much more will he clothe us! The flowers even surpass the beauty of Solomon’s attire.
  - b. “O ye of little faith” = this phrase brings out the central point in these verses. We are called to a life of faith, not fear. **Fear** concerning earthly things leads to a **focus** on earthly things which means we **fail** in discipleship.

## III. The Pursuit for our Lives (Fervor) (Vs. 31-33)

### A. The Repetition (Vs. 31)

1. The point of Vs. 25 is re-emphasized. It addresses the three questions that plague the heart in which there is little faith: 1. What will we eat? 2. What will we drink? 3. What will we wear? The point is further enlarged to go beyond thoughts to actions (‘seek’).
2. Anxiety, worry and fear are not to dominate the Christian. Philippians 4:6 **“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made**

*known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”*

### **B. The Reasons (Vs. 32)**

Two reasons are given in support of the command of Vs. 31:

1. The pursuit of material things is a characteristic of the ungodly, unsaved world (Vs. 32a)
2. The pursuit of material things fails to recognize God’s care for His children (lack of faith). Our Heavenly Father knows our needs even before we ask Him (See Vs. 8)

### **C. The Requirement (Vs. 33)**

1. The Priority (Vs. 33a)
  - a. ‘first’ = order of priority. Christ is to have first place in our lives. *“...that in all things he might have the preeminence.”* (Col. 1:18)  
How many believers get their priorities around the wrong way. You might have heard statements like, “once I have got ahead financially and paid off some debts, then I will tithe faithfully and give to missions” or “I will serve God in my local church once I am established in a good job” or “I can’t do this or that for the Lord now as I have work or sport commitments”
  - b. There are **two goals** we are to make the priority in our lives
    - i. “the kingdom of God” = We live for the future kingdom by acknowledging Christ’s rulership and kingship in our lives in the present. So, we are to be in pursuit of the will of God.
    - ii. “his righteousness” = we know we have been made righteous in our position at the point of salvation but we are to seek practical growth in holiness as an outworking of that position in our lives.
    - iii. 2 Tim. 2:22 *“Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”*
  - c. Challenge: What are you seeking after (pursing) in your life? Is it earthly or heavenly things; eternal or temporal things?
2. The Promise (Vs. 33b)
  - a. “all these things” = what things? The daily needs spoken of in the previous verses (food, drink and clothing). This is not teaching a prosperity Gospel! God promises to supply our needs, not our wants and our lusts (Phil. 4:19).
  - b. “shall be added” = God will take care of our needs when we put Him first in our lives.

**Conclusion:** Christ’s words bring us to a point of decision and choice. There is no middle ground. He is either Lord of all or not Lord at all! Illustration: F.B. Meyer and the giving of the keys of his life to the Lord.