

“Back to School with Jesus: Learn to Prioritize”

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-34

Graphics: back to school, paper, books, backpack

Big Truth: The Sermon on the Mount is essential teaching for the Christian life and the promise of blessing that comes through poverty of spirit and mourning which are the key foundation of the sermon. It's great to learn the words of Jesus and even be able to recite them, as we share the good news. However, Jesus calls us to not only know the words and The Word, but to put those words into practice as we love and serve the world in Jesus' name. Let's go back to school with Jesus. Whether you are young or old, there is always something to learn so that you can put it into practice.

Focus Phrase: Prioritize God and all other things fall into their God-given place in your life.

1. Introduction

- A. “Your priorities must be God first, God second, and God third, until your life is continually face-to-face with God.” (Oswald Chambers)
- B. “Jesus taught that your highest priority must be your relationship with Him. If anything detracts you from that relationship, that activity is not from God. God will not ask you to do something that hinders your relationship with Christ.” (Henry Blackaby)
- C. “If you have not chosen the Kingdom of God first, it will in the end make no difference what you have chosen instead.” (William Law)
- D. Wow! Those are bold. As you can tell, Jesus' next lesson for his disciples from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6 is: **Learn to Prioritize.**
- E. We know that we're asked every day to prioritize...what we do, what we eat, what we think, what we say, and how we move through our day.
- F. If you're anything like me, I tend to live and move by the rhythm of my To-Do list. Every week, I make a list of tasks that need to be done, people that need to be called or visited, and meetings that need to be attended. I tend to be a slave to my To-Do list...but I have also found that if I prioritize the items ON my list, then I'm more apt to complete the important tasks first and then move to those that are less urgent. The downside to my weekly list is that there may be lots of other things that the Holy Spirit is asking to do, but that I deflect because I'm so focused on my list and getting it all completed...which, of course, never actually happens.
- G. Jesus reminds us, often, that our top priority **MUST** be Him...our worship, our praying, our listening, our awe of Him.
- H. We're no different than the people of the first century to whom Jesus was talking on that hillside that day in Matthew 6. Maybe we have more distractions and comforts of life that take our eyes OFF God, but we also have the same invitation to Learn to Prioritize God is all we do.

- I. This lesson from our Back to School with Jesus series today is all about learning to prioritize God's stuff over OUR stuff...our money, our time, what we watch and what we think about.
- J. And what we'll find out is that, if we can learn to prioritize God in our lives, we will experience less worry about today and tomorrow and if we will have enough. When we put the Kingdom first in our lives, God has and will provide for every need.
- K. And, if I'm honest, that sounds pretty good to me...and something that each of us crave in this age of uncertainty and anxiety.
- L. John Wesley said, "...whosoever seeks first the Kingdom, will soon come to seek this only."
- M. The church of Jesus Christ must keep learning to get our eyes off anything but Jesus...to be in awe of God again...and learning to prioritize is the pathway to awe. Remember, this is not ultimately about OUR stuff and OUR priorities, but GOD'S stuff and GOD'S priorities.
- N. Let's pray and then dive into this lesson from Jesus this morning...
- O. **PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)**
- P. Let's get back up that mountain with Jesus...Matthew 6, starting in verse 19...

2. Scripture

A. READ MATTHEW 6:19-24

- i. Let's stop there and begin to unpack the priorities that Jesus is laying out.
- ii. But before we do that, let's recall that Jesus has, so far, been preaching about the coming Kingdom...when He returns and makes all things right... even though it doesn't seem like it now.
- iii. In the first lesson, He said, "Even though things are not yet perfect, you are blessed NOW, because you WILL BE comforted, and filled, and vindicated when the Kingdom comes." So hang in there.
- iv. And when you go through the human trials we all go through - anger, adultery, oaths, divorce, broken relationships, persecution, and others - BECAUSE you are pre-blessed, you are to respond VERY DIFFERENTLY than the world does. Respond with mercy and grace and humility.
- v. And because we're pre-blessed and we're called to respond in ways that conform with the Kingdom and not the world, then we can give, and pray, and fast - the basics - to show our devotion to God.
- vi. In today's scripture passage, the point is that when we devote our lives to God and His Kingdom values, then we are called to prioritize, more and more, God over the things of this world.

- vii. This is practical stuff...and it has to do with money and property, and what our hearts are focused on. Jesus made it clear to the disciples that they had two options: either they would be focused on God's will for their lives, or they would be focused on anything else.
- viii. From a human worldly perspective, usually those OTHER THINGS are money, property, status, activity, pursuits, what we consume, and how we represent ourselves in the world.
- ix. Jesus' contention here is that the disciples, and WE as people, are tempted to break our lives into two categories: faith life and the rest of life - spiritual and secular. When the disciples did that, they were also tempted to rely on God for certain things...and on the world for things the rest of the time.
- x. If they did that, they might be momentarily wealthy, but they would be spiritually bankrupt. They would understand much about the world and how to succeed, but they would understand little about the Kingdom and their everlasting future.
- xi. Here are a few examples Jesus gave them...
 - a. He used TREASURES as the first example.
 - i) If you are so interested in storing up large amount of wealth in this life that you fail to trust God FULLY for your future, then you're missing the true value of the Kingdom. There's NOTHING more important in your life than where you'll spend eternity. It's either with the Lord, having invested in your eternal future, or it's apart from God, having invested in worldly wealth.
 - ii) Jesus didn't give us much in the way of explaining treasures in heaven...but he left it up to the disciples to creatively decide what that means. He's pretty serious about it, though.
 - iii) Are you so focused on wealth and trusting in money that you're finding it irrelevant to trust in God for EVERY part of your future.
 - iv) Maybe another way to ask that is, "If you lost everything today (and I mean everything - think Job here), would you still be able to trust in the Lord for every provision and for your eternal future? How about your kids and grandkids?"
 - v) Prioritize spiritual capital in your life and not money or wealth or property. Those things aren't bad, but where's your priority?
 - b. Then he talked about the EYE.
 - i) In the ancient near east, they believed that the eye was the **source** of light that illuminated objects is order for them to be seen. That's not how we 'see' it today, scientifically, but Jesus was using this as an illustration to reach his audience.

- ii) Basically, if you let your heart become dark by the ways of this world, then your eye won't emit light to the world and you'll not be able to see clearly.
 - iii) If you keep your eye healthy - keeping your heart focused on God and Kingdom values, then you'll emit the light of Jesus to the world.
 - iv) Prioritize God and your heart will be filled with light, and you'll see the world from God's Kingdom perspective.
 - v) And, we need more of God's perspective in our broken and very dark world, amen?
- xii. He then goes back to MONEY...or more specifically, property (mammon)
- a. He can't be much clearer here. Either you will be a slave to property and wealth and money, OR you will serve God. You can't do both.
 - b. Again, he's not saying you can't have money and property. He was asking the disciples what they would experience if all their property or money were completely taken away from them in an instant.
 - c. Would they die and descend into despair? Or would they lean harder into God's provision in their lives...giving thanks to God?
 - d. It's one or the other. You can't serve God AND wealth.
- xiii. I think it was at this point in the sermon that Jesus saw the looks of worry on the faces of those listening. This is hard teaching. Jesus was asking them to choose who they would serve. He's asking US to choose.
- xiv. That's why he finished this section by talking all about worry. Worry is something that can destroy your health and life. Anxiety is rampant in our society at levels that have never been experienced before, especially in the lives of our emerging adults. God knows it. He sees it. The church knows it. I know it. But God also has a clear answer for it.
- xv. Learn to prioritize God over the world. Let's read verse 25...this next section is in direct response to the previous section...that's what it's THERE FOR...

B. READ MATTHEW 6:25-34

- i. OK. Take a deep breath. I'm almost positive that every single person who can hear my voice has heard this or a version of it.
- ii. Why, then, do I worry? Why do you and I find things to stress about or ways that we fail to trust God's provision?
- iii. Bottomline is about **trust**. If I can get real for a moment, I struggle with completely trusting God for every aspect of my life, every decision in the church, and every provision. I suspect you're with me in that, at some level.

- iv. Why? Because if we're honest, our sin nature has created in each one of us **the desire to control everything about our lives**. And when we can't control each aspect of our lives and relationships and work and kids and, you name it, we worry about it.
- v. Our thinking is that, "If I worry about it, then somehow I'm controlling it." That's a lie from the pit of hell. And that's exactly why Jesus spent a significant time saying, "Do not worry." Easier said than done.
- vi. Do you know what Jesus said helps us not worry? Learning to prioritize God over anything else in our lives! If we can, as followers of Jesus and as a church, come before the Lord and be in awe of everything he has always provided in our lives, then everything else fades.
- vii. Jesus said (you'll agree), "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."
- viii. Do you know what that is? That's **permission** from Jesus himself to stay in the moment, work on today's troubles, and be thankful for every way that Jesus has provided for you.
- ix. It's not that you and I won't have troubles, right? This world is messed up. Our lives are never perfect and we create our own trouble a lot of the time.
- x. Jesus is the only person that's perfect...and he's inviting you and me and your neighbors and family to align your life with His...to prioritize what God's thinks more than what you think about your life, or what the world says about you or the church or the world, for that matter.
- xi. Putting God first, no matter what else is happening in your life, good or bad, IS the one and only pathway to less worry about it all.
- xii. M. Eugene Boring wrote this, "Address each day's problems as they come, confident that your life is in the hands of a loving Father, who holds the world in His hands, and will bring it all to a worthy conclusion."
- xiii. I think part of my problem is that I forget that Jesus wins it ALL in the end and my little life here and now, while important to God and me, is a blip compared to the amazing, awesome victory that's coming for you, and me, and every person that ever lived and gave up our control and worry for a Savior who died for ME and YOU and the WORLD.
- xiv. Let's get some application for this...I don't want us to leave here without some tools to get this ball into play...

3. Application

- A. How do you learn to prioritize God in your lives?
- B. First one is to **Spend time with God**

- i. Read about God in your bible. Go beyond the devotional and spend time understanding what you're reading and what God's trying to say. This bible is sufficient to know everything about our God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit.
 - ii. Pray to God. Not just in the morning, but throughout the day. At all times. Pray the Lord's Prayer at Noon with us...set an alarm.
 - iii. Listen to Christian songs on your favorite music station or app.
 - iv. Get into a small group or Sunday School class - prioritize attendance with that group of fellow believers.
 - v. Make a habit of greeting God when you wake you up and let God put you to bed every evening. If you're up in the night, worrying about not sleeping or something going on in your life, use that time to talk to your Savior!
 - vi. Spend TIME with God and HE will help you learn to prioritize Him more.
- C. Second is to **Offer your resources to God's work**
- i. Where you spend you money tells God a lot about your priorities. Take a look at your bank statement and seriously and humbly evaluate where your resources are going. Let the Spirit re-prioritize one at a time.
 - ii. Sharing your resources also has a lot to do with **gratitude**. Be thankful for what you have and then give thanks for God's future provision.
 - iii. Spend time serving God or in a ministry, as opposed to something else that doesn't point you or others towards God.
- D. Finally, **Devote yourself fully to God**
- i. Use your spiritual gifts to glorify God and build up the church.
 - ii. Consecrate your hands and feet to God's service wherever you are - church, school, work, home, somewhere out in the community.
 - iii. One way to devote yourself fully to God is to be in worship, prioritizing that above anything else that might get in the way. That's not a guilt trip, but an invitation to be creative in the ways you worship. Our online stream helps us to worship at other times than just Sunday morning, but it's not designed to be a substitute for Sunday morning worship together in this place. Come to worship! And if you need to do something else on a Sunday morning, keeping you from worship, use 100% of that time to share your faith, love others, and BE Christ right where you are - on the field, in the stands, with your family, at work, wherever you are!

4. Conclusion

- A. If you're taking notes, here's the point Jesus is making: **Prioritize God and all other things fall into their God-given place in your life.**

- B. This is a process...this is a lifestyle...this is LIFE. Give yourself grace, while at the same time being resolved to allow the Holy Spirit to take ONE part of your life at a time and turn it fully to God.
- C. We can do nothing less than give God our all for the sacrifice He made for your salvation...everlasting life...and peace in this life. His name is Jesus!
- D. Let's DO THIS! Class dismissed! Let's pray...