

Right From The Start

Pastor Carlos Sibley

January 5th, 2020

Let's open our Bibles to Matthew chapter six. As we go to Matthew chapter six on this first Sunday of the first month of a new year, we go to the first book in the New Testament and we look at the first sermon that was preached by Jesus. We refer to it as the Sermon on the Mount because of the location that he spoke these words. Today I want to read just a few verses from this sermon. It covers chapters five, six and seven, but want to read a portion of scripture from chapter six. If I could put a title on this message, I would call it, "Right from the Start". Right from the start. Now, isn't it true that our days go so much better when they start right? Don't you love it when a day starts right? When you look forward to a day, or you look forward to a week, or you look forward to a new year, and all of a sudden you realize you have overslept, that the milk is past date in the refrigerator, the tank is low on gas, the bread is molded and you're just like, "I want to start over." "I just want to start the day over." Well, my hope is today, by looking at this passage of scripture, that we would get the year started right. And we would not get to February or get to June and say, "I wish I could just start over. I just started the year in a bad place and in a wrong way." Well, let's get it right from the start.

In Matthew chapter six, I want to begin reading in verse 19,

¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^[e] destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.^[f]

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. 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 which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?^[g] ²⁸ And why are you anxious 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 arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them

all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Right from the start. I want to summarize these verses I've just read and the message that I'm about to share with you in this one sentence. How do we get it right from the start? Listen, before a plan and before a program, we need a pursuit. Before a plan and before a program, we need a pursuit. You may be like me and already, five days into this year, you have adopted some new plan. You've chosen some new program. Maybe you have an app on your phone that has enrolled you in some kind of new program for discipleship, some kind of new plan for reading the word, some kind of organization that you have joined regarding your diet. Maybe you've set up a new budget and you've got a plan for spending that's new for 2020. Before any of that, hear me, before a plan and before a program, you need a pursuit. You need to make sure before you set your plan and before you work your program that you are pursuing the right things first. According to Matthew 6:33, the key verse of this passage, the right thing for us to pursue first is the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And so today, think with me for a few minutes about your pursuit, about what you're seeking, about what you're going after. What will be success this year? What will be a win this year? When you look back 10 years from now, if the Lord has not returned, and you think about what you started after in this decade, what's right at the top?

He says, seek you first the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God. What is that? What is the kingdom of God? Matthew mentions it here and then throughout the gospel of Matthew more than a dozen times, he gives parables that tells us what the kingdom of God is like, what the kingdom of heaven is like. And he wants us to understand, he wants us to know, he wants us to grasp what he's talking about when he speaks about this new kingdom. The kingdom of God is synonymous with salvation. If you have come to know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, if you have received him for forgiveness of sin, you are a citizen of a different kingdom than this world. You have become a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. You have become a citizen of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the rule and reign of Jesus Christ in the hearts of humanity. In the heart of every person who receives Jesus Christ by grace, through faith. So today the boundaries of the kingdom of God stretch as far as any person that has received Jesus as their Lord and savior. The kingdom of God is an eternal kingdom. The kingdom of God is being fulfilled around us as people trust Jesus Christ as Lord and savior. The boundaries of the kingdom of God are infinite when it comes to time, but the boundaries of the kingdom of God are not geographical. North, South, East, and West. Wherever there is a nation, a person, a tribe or tongue where an individual has submitted their life to Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God has come to that territory. We are citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

He says for us to seek that kingdom first. To put it first in our priorities, to put it first in our pursuit, but not just kingdom of God, but also his righteousness. The kingdom of God is wherever Christ rules and reigns in a heart. His righteousness refers to his ways, to God's character, to God's attributes, and when we seek first the kingdom, we also are to seek his righteousness. We are to seek his attributes, his character, his ways. Earlier, Pastor Vic spoke of God's goodness. We sang about God's goodness. We had a song there that just went through a list of all the different ways that Jesus Christ is worthy. Those are his attributes. God

is a God of mercy and grace and love and forgiveness and justice and power and holiness. As we seek his kingdom, we're also to pursue his attributes, pursue his character, pursue his ways,

By pursuing his kingdom and pursuing his righteousness. What happens? Here's what it looks like. When we pursue his kingdom and we pursue his righteousness, what will happen in our life is that the King is exalted and the kingdom is advanced. When we first pursue the kingdom of heaven, we exalt the King and we see the kingdom advance in ways that agree with his character, his attributes, and his ways. Psalm 85 King David says, I want to know your ways. God has a way of doing things. He has a way of operating, and when we pursue the kingdom and his righteousness first, King Jesus is exalted and his kingdom advances through our life to other people. We see his righteousness advancing as well. Now, what if we don't pursue his kingdom first? That means we're pursuing another kingdom first. He says, seek first the kingdom of God. Well, what if today I'm seeking first the kingdom of Carlos. And for me to seek first the kingdom of Carlos means that I'm looking at the way I live and the way I operate and the way my heart goes and the things that I want, and I measure success according to what advances me, according to what exalts me, according to what makes my life better with disregard for others. The pursuit for us in the beginning of this year must be the pursuit that Jesus came forth teaching from the very beginning, and that is to seek first, not the kingdom of Carlos or whatever your name is, it is to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Last week we met together and we talked about reading the word and we talked about getting a plan for reading the word. The plan that I offered to you is to take 12 books of the Bible that relate to the different genres of scripture and focus on one book of the Bible for a month. That afternoon I got a picture from someone that had prepared something and it was delivered to me. A young girl in our youth ministry had taken that reading plan and put the 12 months on it with each genre of scripture, with each book of the Bible, and presented it to me and gave it for me to use as my guide for reading this year. Well, here's what I assumed. I assumed that when we gathered last week that you would want to pursue the kingdom of God first. And so we talked about a plan. We talked about reading his word, getting to know him. I was making the assumption that you want to know God, that you want to know his ways, and the way that begins is us reading his word. Getting to know him and letting him reveal himself to who he is and what kind of God he is, and for him to show us his righteousness. But suppose today you've entered this new year pursuing a different kingdom. You may have no plan to read God's word. You may just get to it when you feel like you can get to it, because in your mind you're pursuing a different kind of success. You're pursuing a different kingdom, and you may have made your reading list this year based on some kind of wealth that you want to accomplish, based on some kind of degree that you want to get, based on some kind of job you want to get, based on some kind of career that you want to build, some kind of promotion that you're hoping to receive, and you've put first your kingdom instead of God's kingdom.

Jesus does not speak evil about us owning things. He does not speak evil about us purchasing clothes or food. He doesn't say those things are not necessary, what he says is that it's not necessary to worry about those things and be anxious over those things and to allow those things to be first in our life. What he says for us to do is to seek first his kingdom. Let him be at the top. So that means that by pursuing the kingdom of God, we have to put something second. We have to put some things third so that his kingdom can be first. John Stott, one of the

greatest Bible teachers, Bible writers, commentators that Christianity has known and he wrote about seeking first the kingdom of heaven. He says it so much better than I can say it and I just want to read a little bit of what he said about seeking first God's kingdom. John Stott wrote these words,

"When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God, he was not referring to the general sovereignty of God over nature in history, but to the specific rule over his own people, which he himself had inaugurated and which it begins in anybody's life when he humbles himself, repents, believes, submits and is born again. God's kingdom is Jesus Christ ruling over his people in total blessing and total demand. To seek first this kingdom is to desire as a first importance the spread of the reign of Jesus Christ. Such a desire will start with ourselves until every single department of our life, home, marriage, family, personal morality, professional life, business ethics, bank balance, tax returns, lifestyle, citizenship is joyfully and freely submissive to Christ. It will continue in our immediate environment with the acceptance of evangelistic responsibility towards our relatives, colleagues, neighbors, and friends. And it will also reach out in global concern for the missionary witness of the church."

That's seeking first the kingdom of heaven that's following Christ whole heartedly.

So take a moment and think whose kingdom has first place in your life? This pursuit of the kingdom of God begins with a choice and a conversation. Where do I start? How do I roll out of here? I want to get it right, at the start of this new year. It begins with a choice and it begins with a conversation. In the verses that I read prior to verse 33, it speaks of laying up treasures in heaven. It speaks of the eye being a lamp, and it speaks about serving two masters. There's a choice to be made. Jesus lays it out, we have a choice to make. And the choice is between two treasures and two visions and two masters. And when we make a choice between two treasures and two visions and two masters, we ultimately have made a choice between which kingdom we will seek first. And the two treasures we have to choose between are eternal treasure and temporary treasure. And he shows that he says, "Don't lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal." He speaks of treasures that are temporary. "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth or rust can't destroy and thieves cannot break in and steal." So the choice today for us is to look at what we're doing with our time, with our talent, with our treasures, and say, which treasure am I storing? Which treasure am I building? I would say to you that to seek first the kingdom of God, we would choose the eternal treasure and look for ways in our life that our time and our talent and our treasure can be used first and foremost for things that matter for eternity.

Then two visions. He says the eye is the lamp. If your eye is healthy, the whole body will be full of light. If it's bad, the whole body will be full of darkness. Maybe an easier way to understand what he means by an eye and a lamp and darkness and light is to realize that the eye in scripture can be synonymous with the heart. In scripture we talk about fixing our eyes on Jesus and setting our heart on Christ. You see the interchange there? Fix your eyes on Jesus. Set your heart on things above. They work together and he saying, here's a choice. You can have a good eye, good heart, and choose light or you can have a bad eye, a bad heart, and choose darkness. You have to make a choice. And then two masters, no one can serve two masters.

You cannot serve God and money or God and wealth, or God and mammon is what I believe the King James version says. We've got to choose what we are going to own and who's going to own us. We've got to make a choice, and if we choose eternal treasure and the good eye of light and God over wealth, then we're choosing to seek the kingdom of heaven first.

Not only a choice, but a conversation. It starts with a conversation. "Pastor, I want to get this started. Where do I start? How do I make this happen in my life?" Just an acknowledgement before the Lord. I want my treasures to count for eternity. I want my vision to be fixed on you. I want my master to be you and not the things of this world. And that requires a conversation, talking to God about it. And he had talked to the Lord about it. Acknowledge to the Lord and admit to the Lord who you want to be first in your life. Don't miss this opportunity. Don't just come in here and check a box. Right now in your heart, communicate with him and tell him. Have a conversation. Let me show you a prayer right here and how this conversation takes place. Back up in chapter six, verse nine. In Matthew chapter six verse nine you see Jesus teaching about how to have a conversation with God and he calls it prayer. In verse nine he says, "Pray then like this", and listen to how he teaches to pray. He says, "Pray then like this, our father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread."

Do you notice the order? Right there in the teaching of prayer, he lays out what Matthew 6:33 says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." That's exactly what he had taught about prayer with the Father, and before he ever said that he says, "Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name." In our prayer life, we exalt God. From the very beginning, from the very start of your day, from the very start of your week, from the very start of your year, from the start of this decade, Our father in heaven, you be hallowed, you be exalted, you rule and reign. You are the King, not me, and not these possessions. And Jesus teaches us to pray like that.

What's the second? He goes, "Your kingdom come, your will be done." It's easy for us to seek first the kingdom of God, but the first words out of our mouth before the Lord is, "Lord, this is what I'm going to do today and I need you to bless it." "Lord, this is decision I've made and I hope it's okay with you. Please work it out." He's saying, look, "Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And then where does he go to, "Give us this day our daily bread." You see it even in this conversation that he teaches about prayer, that we start with God being exalted. We start with his kingdom coming, and then we go to him, now Lord, you provide, and that's the pattern he shows in verse 33 when he says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things". These things that he talked about, what we eat, what we drink, what we wear. Those were categories that people would understand, in Jesus' culture, as being what we worry about in life. What we're going to eat and wear. Some societies and cultures, they call these things that you eat, drink, and wear the Supreme life, if you succeed in what you're eating and drinking and wearing, you're accomplishing the Supreme life. In Rome, Italy they have a term for it, it's called the good life. And if you're successful in what you eat and drink and wear, there's a look to it, there's a feel to it. And it's called the good life.

I'm standing in front of you today offering you a different kind of life I'm offering to you today what Jesus offers. And that's abundant life. The abundant life is better than the world's good life. So what do we do? Where do you go from here? How do we start our day? Start our week. Start our year right? Three action steps right here in God's word. The first thing I would say to you is that these are not suggestions. I'm saying, based on the word of God, do this. Watch some birds. Watch some birds. Here's the crazy thing. I'm not giving you something symbolic here. Watch some birds. When you're driving and you see that Hawk on the power line, slow down a little bit and watch the bird. When you see the buzzards, when you see the chickadee. When you see the sparrow, when you see the Blue Jay, and the Cardinal, and the Finch, watch some birds. Here's the second thing, plant some flowers. This is deep, isn't it? It's the horticulturalist coming out. I'm not being any deeper or any simpler than Jesus himself. Jesus said, don't worry, don't be anxious.

Verse 26, "Look at the birds." That's Jesus. And for some of you, the healthiest thing you can do in this new year is that by the close of the day, or tomorrow, buy yourself a bird feeder and hang it in a window that you can see early every morning. Fill it full of bird seed and start your day watching the birds and see how God works. Plant some flowers. He says, look at the birds, and then he says, consider the lilies of the field. You're worried about life. Just stare at some flowers. Notice the detail. Notice the intricacies, notice the seasons. Then third, talk to the Father. Talk to the Father. You see, when we start wrong, when we choose wrong, it's like throwing red meat to the lion of worry and anxiety. And they will eat our lunch and our supper and our rest. Watch some birds, plant and flowers. Talk to the Father. Seek first the kingdom of heaven.