

Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God

Date: 01 January 2017
Services: 730, 930 (T), 5pm, 630pm
Series: 5 new year challenges
Title: Seek first the kingdom of God
Passages: Matthew 6:25-34
Outline: **Why we don't**
How we can

- I don't know how you are with new year's resolutions...
- Some years I ignore the whole concept, knowing that I've failed dismally in the past... and lasted all of a day in eating better or exercising daily...
- Other times I think - well - it's a good opportunity to try again... to reset...
- You know when you have computer issues... and someone will tell you to shut down for a while and restart...
- ...although today is just another day... there **IS** something fresh about starting a new year... 1st Jan - 2017... brand new... and you feel as though that affords the opportunity to reset - to restart... in the hope that booting up again will provide new energy - fresh vision or energy - to become more like the person you'd like to be!
- But we're not just talking about stuff like eating less and exercising more...
- I want us to think about where we're at with God...
- Here's a quote I'd like to share with you from a Canadian pastor many of you will have heard of - Don Carson:
 - "People do not **drift** toward holiness.
 - Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord.
 - We drift toward **compromise** and call it **tolerance**;
 - we drift toward **disobedience** and call it **freedom**;
 - we drift toward **superstition** and call it **faith**.
 - We cherish the **indiscipline** of **lost self-control** and call it **relaxation**;
 - we slouch toward **prayerlessness** and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped **legalism**;
 - we slide toward **godlessness** and convince ourselves we have been **liberated**."
- So in the knowledge that our tendency is to drift away from God and godliness... and that we need God's grace to grow in our zeal and to stay **keen** and **clear**... we thought we'd spend January on some new year challenges...
- Short, sharp, clear, pointed exhortations... all from the lips of Jesus in Matthew's gospel...
- Here's where we are heading over January:
 - JAN 01SEEK First the Kingdom of God
 - JAN 08TAKE up your cross and FOLLOW Me

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JAN 15 LOVE your enemies

JAN 22 LET your light shine before others

JAN 29 GO and MAKE disciples of all nations

- And I hope you'll be back each week - or if you're visiting - that you'll listen in each week - and hear some fresh insights into these verses so we may begin the year clear and keen and committed.... //
- So today - *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness....*
- And I have just two simple points -
Why **don't** we?
How **can** we?

1. WHY DON'T WE?

- Of course we need to see this challenge in the context of the passage...
- So please turn with me to Matthew 6 vv25ff...
- *Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear... is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?*
- Now the passage seems to be about people worrying about food and clothing in terms of not having **any** or **enough** or worrying about where it's going to **come** from...
- And although there are people in our community in great need... and of course many in poor nations in great need... this is not really the issue for most of **us here...**
- I mean after all - how many of us here this morning were actually concerned about the where breakfast - or lunch - or dinner were going to come from?
- Jesus says - *do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on* - and we think - well I didn't spend *any* time today worrying about those things - I must be doing OK!
- yes we live in a society (here in Australia) where only a minority actually wonder how to feed their children and where the next meal is coming from; but we live in a society that spends a lot of time being **very anxious** about these things!
- where a lot of attention is given in **vanity** to **what** we should **wear** and what makes us look **good**.
- Where you can go to conventions and have a consultant to help you discover what your **colours** are.
- where eating and drinking and clothing figure on commercial after commercial on the TV, radio and in print.
- we live in a culture that encourages some people to be so anxious about what they **eat** or **don't eat**; **so** anxious about their **looks**, that young people can actually **die** trying to get the right look - trying to look like the models in the magazines - trying to find acceptance - even trying to get the envy of their peers - trying to **be** someone - trying to be **noticed** by their **looks**!
- and because we as Christians live in that culture - it very easily rubs off on us and we are caught up in it all before we notice.

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- we are so concerned - anxious - about how we come **across** - about what other people will **think about** us - yes about being **accepted** - about wanting to be **liked** - to be **well-thought** of.
- If we have people for a meal - we are so anxious about the food - will the people **like** it? - will it turn **out** all right? - will people think it is too **unhealthy**? - will it be **trendy**? - **acceptable** in the **culture**?
- what will we serve to **drink** with it - do I have enough **variety** to offer in the way of drinks - will the **wine** go with the **meal**; will the people mind if we **serve alcohol**? - or if we **don't** serve alcohol?
- and we reckon we are **not** anxious about **food, drink** and **clothes** - **rubbish!**
- we **measure ourselves** daily against **others** by these things
- of **course** we are worried - **anxious** about them. ///
- And that is a key reason our mind is **not** filled with the matters of Jesus' kingdom and his righteous...
- We're distracted by the **trivial** and the **mundane**... by the **superficial**... by the things of this **world**... ///
- and this morning we are being confronted with Jesus' exhortation to **STOP**.
- but **how**?
- first - see them in perspective
- v25 - is not life **more** than **food** and the **body** more than **clothing**?
- in other words - Jesus says - come on - wake up - see that life itself and our bodies - both gifts of God - consist of much more significant stuff than we put **in** them or what we put **on** them!!
- let's stop being **superficial**!!
- the **second** thing to see is this - that God will take care of these needs - that these are under God's sovereign care.
- ie - to realise that we do have food and drink to put into our bodies and clothing to put on them because God's wills it to be so.
- all of us here this morning had enough to eat last week because of God's provision - because he willed it - because he supplied it!
- ...therefore... don't make your life all about these things!
- They are not the **stuff** of **life**...
- and Jesus points to what ought to be a basic and fundamental difference between the Christian and the non-Christian.
- Jesus says - have a look with me at v31 - *so do not worry, saying, 'what shall we eat?' or 'what shall we drink?' or 'what shall we wear'? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them....*
- They've got nothing better to do - no higher goal; no higher principle in life but to run after - pursue - food and drink and clothing and all the things that go along with them

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that we've explored.

- Jesus says - **leave** that to **them!**
- We have someone in our great God who knows about all these things and supplies them in abundance.
- therefore to fill your life with running after them as a priority is incompatible with trusting the Master you have chosen.
- *Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness* says Jesus...
- Why **don't** we?
- Because often – without even noticing... we allow our lives – and our head space - to be filled with the **vain** and the **superficial**....
- We are easily distracted – pulled away....
- So let's look secondly

2. **HOW DO WE?** -

- how do we seek first his kingdom and righteousness...
- now we need to ask from the outset - what does it mean - to seek first God's kingdom?
- let me try and put it as simply and clearly as I can:
- we usually think of a kingdom as an area or sphere where a King rules.
- we think of it more in **geographical** terms...
- but when it comes to **God's** kingdom – it is not a **geographical area** under his rule, but **hearts** and **lives** under his **rule**.
- So to seek first God's kingdom is to have as the central desire of our life - to have as the thing we pursue (as opposed to food and clothes) - is first that our own **lives** come **completely** under his **rule** - are **totally submitted** to **him** - - our lives in **totality** - **home, family, personal morality, educational priorities, professional life, bank balance, education, relationships** – **all under his rule and pleasing to him... , - - and second**
- to have as our great desire that God's rule extend over **other** people's **hearts** and **lives** who are still currently busy throwing their energy behind **food** and **clothing** or **status** or **power** or **career**....
- it's to see **ourselves** under God's rule and to **want** to see – have a **passion** to see - **work** to see - **others** also come under his **rule**.
- and to seek his **righteousness**?
- seeking his righteousness means you will be seeking to be in right-relationship with the Lord Jesus.
- It's to know in humility that you cannot be right with him by **impressing** him but by admitting you're completely **dependent** on him....
- To know that you cannot be right with him on your own or by your own efforts... but to seek after that right relationship which comes by saying "sorry" I cannot do this on my own – forgive me, cleanse me, transform me....

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- it's a hunger and thirst to live a godly, stand out life that pleases him and honours him...
- It's seeking a deep walk him through his Word which changes your life...
- It's seeking to rid your life of those habitual sins you've grown too familiar with or begun to excuse...
- It's a desire to be generous and kind and patient.... slow to become angry and compassionate and self-controlled – as the Lord Jesus is...
- To seek his righteousness means you'll be more concerned for the inward beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, then the outward adornment of jewellery and fine clothes!//
- Friends – if only we would see the importance of this...
- If only as much energy went in to our desire to see God's rule expand and our character grow, as into our wardrobe, our fridge, our pantry or our holiday or party plans... //
- How do we?
- We reset... recalibrate... restart... we get back on the right track...
- We make what is important most important
- We focus... we draw close... we make our relationship with God our priority...

- this message this morning ought to be liberating... - - we are free from the rubbish that the world carries on about - materialism, self-discovery, self sufficiency - self this and self that!
- we've been rescued from a life of anxiousness about the trivial and the meaningless and the absurd, - to live life in the service of the King and the pursuit of what is important and real and vital to Him ///
- so here is a new year's challenge... to seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness...
- and the promise? – he'll take care of the rest... you can leave that with him....
- finish with two stories....
- First... The father of a boy killed after he was hit by a car on Christmas Day has embraced the man charged over his death, and extended him an offer of forgiveness.
- Josiah Sisson, 9, died in hospital on Tuesday from horrific injuries sustained in the crash, which happened on Sunday evening when he was out in Springwood, south of Brisbane, looking at Christmas lights with his friends.
- Police said the accused driver, Adrian Murray, took a corner too quickly and lost control of his car, hitting Josiah.
- People comments on the facebook post couldn't cope with this...
 - *What rubbish The idiot was driving recklessly including speeding, being intoxicated and being a hoon, as a result he killed a little boy. And the father gives him a hug and says it will be alright mate. No wonder the place is stuffed. Loony religious nuts!!!*
 - *Or this: my favourite so far: I can't even remotely think of how you could do that. He's a drunk who was driving and killed an innocent child, yet you forgive him? Christ almighty. To which I responded that Christ Almighty was precisely the reason*

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this guy could forgive..

- Josiah's father - in hugging the man and offering forgiveness.... Was seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness....!
- My second story - 18 year old daughter of someone I know in ministry.... Overseas in June July on a mission trip with Year 13 like Michael did 3 years back... she had a stroke and had to be medically evacuated back to Australia... lost speech and coordination...
- Slowly - many months of intense therapy - some of which is ongoing - has made great progress.
- Here's what she wrote on her facebook page light night on near year's eve
 - *2016 wasn't the year I expected.*
 - *I was expecting to work, both at my church doing ministry and at my part time job. I was expecting to be close to finishing a Diploma of Christian Studies. I was expecting to get my green P's, go out to bars with my friends and enjoy my first year out of school.*
 - *It didn't end up being the 2016 I expected. Believe it or not, it was better.*
 - *I grew closer to God - He helped me grow and brought me through the storm of this year! I grew closer to my family - they are the best people I know. And I have made amazing friends from church and Year 13 and countless others who have made this year the best year of my life.*
 - *I also grew to know myself - one of many incredible blessing of this year. I've become more comfortable in my own skin, but most of all I have come to understand my identity as a daughter of the King - an identity that will never change, not even if there has been a loss of language or understanding or sensation or vision or movement.*
 - *I'm looking forward to a new year. I'm excited to start my university degree - I'll be heading to Sydney Uni to study Psychology in March 2017. I'm looking forward to going back to work and doing ministry again at my church. But most importantly, I'm also feeling at ease, knowing that no matter what happens in 2017, "it is well with my soul!"*
- That's a person who is seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness...
- May it be our aim... our new challenge... then step back and see what the Lord will do as we do that...