

Main Idea: In Matthew 6:33 Jesus gives us a promise that will change the way we live, the *promise of God’s provision*. As we ponder this promise, we’ll notice there are two parts to it.

Two initial observations about this promise...

1. This is a conditional promise.
  2. This is promise with political implications.
- I. In this promise Jesus gives us a responsibility.
- A. We are commanded to seek.
    1. We’re prone to seek wrong things (19-24).
    2. We’re prone to seek appropriate things in inappropriate ways (25-32).
    3. We’re called to make the most important thing most important to us.
  - B. We are commanded to seek something first.
  - C. We are commanded to seek first God’s kingdom.
    1. There are two kingdoms in this world.
    2. To be a Christian is to make it clear that the true king is your king.
  - D. We are commanded to seek first God’s righteousness.
    1. Mere religion offers a deficient righteousness (5:20).
    2. Jesus is the standard and provision for true righteousness.
- II. In this promise Jesus gives us a guarantee.
- A. If we’re seeking God’s kingdom first, we already possess the greatest treasure.
  - B. If we’re seeking God’s kingdom first, we can be sure that God will give us everything else we need.
    1. He meets our temporal needs.
    2. He meets our eternal need.
- Implications: Because we have this promise...
1. We must refuse to worry.
  2. We must make sure that what matters to our King matters most to us.

In just two days we will have the privilege to do what many of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world do *not* have the opportunity to do. We will be able to get in our cars and drive to a voting booth and take part in the selection of the individuals who will lead our country.

We had no say in choosing the country into which we have been born. It’s been given to us, by God’s providence, to be citizens in the United States of America. Again by God’s providence, our country isn’t a monarchy, or a dictatorship, where we would have no say in who leads us. We enjoy democracy and therefore have a voice in selecting our leaders and in so doing, contributing to the kind of country our children and their children will experience.

And for us who know Christ, we have a dual citizenship. Our ultimate citizenship is in heaven, according to Philippians 3:20, and we’re eagerly waiting for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who one day will come from heaven and establish His kingdom on earth. But we’re also citizens of this earthly country, and the Lord calls us to be the kind of citizens that make Him attractive to the on looking world. As Paul says in Titus 3:1-2, “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.”

Jesus said, “To whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48).” We have been given the privilege and responsibility to vote. And so, as recipients of this gift, I urge you to thankfully and prayerfully use it and head to the polls.

But how shall we vote? For what issues, and for what individuals? This morning, we’re going to look at a verse in God’s Word that will help us know how to please our Heavenly Father as we make our important decisions.

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

As you know, we're in the middle of a series I'm calling, "*Promises to Live By in the Crucible of Suffering*." We're looking at promises God has given us that can enable us to face difficult times with confidence and assurance. We started off with the *promise of a way of escape*, in 1 Corinthians 10:13. And then we pondered His *promise of a good outcome*, given in Romans 8:28-30. Last time we meditated on 1 John 1:8-10 and marveled at God's *promise of forgiveness*.

God has given us hundreds of promises in His Word, but I've selected these because they've been so helpful in my life, particularly in times of suffering, and I want to equip you so you're fortified in your time of need. That's why I'm encouraging you to memorize these promise passages. Hide them in your heart, so you can live by them.

This morning we come to another timely promise, one that I first learned and memorized as a teenager. It's Matthew 6:33, and it's here that Jesus gives us the *promise of God's provision*. In a moment, we'll ponder this promise and notice there are two parts to it. But before we break it apart and examine it word by word, I need to make a couple of initial observations.

### Two initial observations about this promise...

1. *This is a conditional promise.* By contrast, we saw an unconditional promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13. In every situation we can be sure that God will give us a way of escape, a way to honor Him. We saw another unconditional promise in Romans 8:28. There God says that He works all things together for our good. There are no conditions to that promise. God guarantees that for those whom He has called, for those who love Him, He will work together all things for good.

But today's promise is different. It's a conditional promise. There is something that God says we must do if we are going to experience the wonderful reality of what God says He will do. Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." What's the condition? We must seek God's kingdom and righteousness and give them first place in our hearts and lives. And if we do? Then all these things will be given to us. And if we don't? Then we're on our own. That's God's promise, the promise of provision, and it's a conditional promise.

2. *This is promise with political implications.* Sometimes people will say, "You shouldn't talk about politics in church." If that's true, then we have a problem on our hands. Jesus talked politics. In fact, He had a lot to say about it, so if we're going to take seriously who Jesus is and what He taught, as He commanded us to do in the Great Commission ("teach them to observe *all things I have commanded you*"), then we can't avoid the subject.

Read the Gospel accounts and you'll discover that Jesus preached a message filled with political implications. For instance, in Luke 13:31 the Pharisees came to Jesus and said, "Herod wants to kill you." Why would King Herod want to kill Jesus? It's because Jesus was stepping on his political turf. I find Jesus' response interesting, "Go tell that fox..." and then gave the Pharisees a personal message for the king.

He told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36)." He also told Pilate, "You are right in saying that I am a king...Everyone on the side of the truth listens to me (John 18:37)." Powerful words to say to the Roman ruler who would decide whether you lived or died!

But Jesus not only spoke words for political leaders, He also had plenty of politically significant things to say to His followers and even His critics. Like, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's (Matt 22:21)." Give to Caesar? Those were fighting words for some Jews, like the Zealots, who wouldn't think of giving Caesar

anything but a knife in the back. But Jesus doesn't want His people fighting Caesar. They are to give to him what he deserves, in this case, taxes.

But lest we think that Jesus wants His followers to be mindless puppets of the state, let's remember His words in Mark 13:9-11, "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit."

There's just no escaping the fact that Jesus didn't compartmentalize religion and politics, and His message was filled with political implications.

And then there's today's text. Jesus said, "Seek first God's kingdom." My friend, that is a political statement for sure. In Jesus' day there was a Roman emperor by the name of Tiberius Julius Caesar, and such talk of seeking any kingdom but his brought his certain wrath. And around the world today, this command brings a similar reaction to powerful rulers who demand their citizens seek *their* kingdom first.

So I would suggest to you that what we're about to see is a perfect promise to take with you into that voting booth. Jesus didn't say to *seek first your political party ticket*. He said to *seek first the kingdom of God*. What does that mean, and how do we do it?

To answer those questions we need to set the context for this promise. This promise is tucked away in Jesus' most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. If you read the sermon, you'll quickly notice that Jesus meddles in a host of subjects we tend to consider private. In addition to politics, He talks about marriage, divorce, sex, anger, your money, your tongue, your need to love difficult people, and more. Why? Why does Jesus address such controversial subjects? Because this sermon is, in essence, *Kingdom Living 101*.

Jesus preached this message early in His public ministry. He'd just done a tour throughout Galilee and healed hundreds of people. Crowds were flocking to Him. So according to 5:1, when He saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside, sat down, and began to address His disciples, knowing full well the crowds were listening in.

In the first Gospel, Matthew presents Jesus as *king*. He gives Jesus' royal genealogy in chapter 1. He shows the magi asking, "Where is the one who has been born *king* of the Jews?" in chapter 2. And right off the bat, he records this important sermon in chapters 5-7, in which King Jesus makes it clear that if you follow me, these are My terms.

Yes, Jesus offers a kingdom, but it's different from any kingdom you've ever seen. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," says the King in Matthew 5:3. To enter Jesus' kingdom, you must admit you don't deserve to be there, that you are spiritually poor. And don't expect the world to applaud you either. "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (5:10)."

In this sermon Jesus talks a lot about two important themes, and we'll see both in our promise-text. One is *kingdom*. The other is *righteousness*.

Look at 5:20, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." Religion says, "Live right, and you'll enter God's kingdom." But Jesus says, "Unless your righteousness surpasses the supposed righteousness of the most upstanding citizens in Israel, you *won't* enter God's kingdom." Over and over King Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, but I say to you," to highlight the utter deficiency of self-

righteousness and the fundamental need of every person for genuine, God-produced righteousness.

And that's why Jesus ends His sermon as He does, when He says in Matthew 7:7, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." Jesus knows we lack the true righteousness that God requires, that it's not something we can achieve in our own strength. It's something He came to *give*, and therefore we must receive it from Him.

It's right in the middle of this sermon that Jesus reveals the promise we're considering, a two part promise. Part one, our responsibility. Part two, God's guarantee.

### I. In this promise Jesus gives us a responsibility.

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you as well." To listening disciples and would-be disciples Jesus reveals this responsibility. Let's walk through it word by word.

*But seek*, says Jesus.

**A. We are commanded to seek.** Jesus could have used a lot of different verbs, but He uses this one, *seek*. The Greek, *zeteite* from *zeiteo*. Significant? Yes. There's actually a play on words going on. Look back at verses 31-32, "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." See those words "run after"? In the Greek it's *epizeiteo*. Same Greek root. What do pagans do, people who do not know the true God? They run after the things of this world, like food and drink and clothing. They *seek* them. But Jesus says, "If you are my follower, I want you to *seek* something else, something far more significant, something out of this world."

The truth is, right here is where our fundamental problem as sinners shows up, in the things we *seek*. It happens in a couple of ways that Jesus just addressed in His sermon.

1. *We're prone to seek wrong things (19-24).* Jesus said in verses 19-24, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money."

Jesus said that because that's what we naturally tend to do. We seek wrong things. We run after wrong things. Like earthly treasures, things that moth and rust will destroy. Like money. Money is a fine servant but a terrible master. You can't serve God and money at the same time.

If money is our god, if the things of this world are the object of our worship, then we can't follow Jesus. We won't want to follow Him. In order to be His disciple, we need to change what we're seeking.

But it's not just our proclivity to seek wrong things...

2. *We're prone to seek appropriate things in inappropriate ways (25-32).* That's what Jesus addressed in verses 25-32, "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 important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of

the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 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."

What we eat, drink, and wear. Those aren't evil things. Those are legitimate needs, and our Father cares about them, and we should give attention to them in ways that please Him. By working, and saving, and planning, and even sharing with those in need. But here's something we're not to do. We're not to worry about such things, to be preoccupied with them, to live like they're what life is all about.

No, says Jesus. Don't run after such things. Don't seek them first in your life. There's something else that should have that place in your heart. Friends, if we make the economy the number one issue that drives our voting on Tuesday, then we're thinking just like the pagans that Jesus says we're *not* to be like. There's something else far more significant. Jesus makes it clear that...

3. *We're called to make the most important thing most important to us.* That's what we are to seek.

But not just seek. Notice Jesus' next word. "But seek *first*."

**B. We are commanded to seek something first.** Now we're talking about priorities. There are legitimate things in our lives that become illegitimate when they assume the wrong position on our priority grid. Seek food? You better, or you'll starve. But seek it first? No way. That place in your heart is already taken if belong to Jesus. Seek the welfare of your kids? Absolutely, that's part of your God-given assignment, parents. But seek your kids' welfare first and let that drive your life? No. In fact, you're actually not seeking their eternal welfare when you make their temporal welfare your highest aim in life.

So what are we to seek first? Jesus tells us. "But seek first *His kingdom*."

**C. We are commanded to seek first God's kingdom.** That, of course, raises the important question, what is the kingdom of God? It's not really that complicated. What's a kingdom? To have a kingdom, you must have a *king* who *rules* over a *realm*. Those three components make up a kingdom: a king, a rule, and a realm.

I checked to see how many kingdoms there are in the world today.<sup>1</sup> I found about 25 countries listed, but most of those have a constitutional monarchy, like Belgium, Japan, and Great Britain. So those kings don't really rule. But there are three classified as absolute monarchies. If you live in the realm of Saudi Arabia, there's a man named King Abdullah who rules over you. If you're in the realm of Swaziland, King Mswati III rules. If you're in Oman, Sultan Qabus ibn Sa'id rules. If you live in one of those realms, you are under the rule of a person whose will controls your life.

The kingdom of God, then, refers to the rule of God over a realm. Earlier in this sermon Jesus taught us to pray for it, "Your kingdom come...on earth as it is in heaven (6:10)." Now He tells us to seek this kingdom, and to seek it first.

Why would we need to seek God's kingdom? Because there's a problem.

1. *There are two kingdoms in this world.* I know I mentioned three kingdoms, but in God's eyes there are just two. We find these two kingdoms identified in

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0775675.html>

Revelation 11:15, which contains a promise of what Jesus Christ will do when He returns to earth. “The **kingdom of the world** has become the **kingdom of our Lord** and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”

So there’s the kingdom of this world, and there’s the kingdom of the Lord God and His chosen Messiah. Originally, there was only one kingdom. When God created this universe, He did so as The King, and He shared the rule of His realm with His image-bearers, Adam and Eve. But, of course, instead of fulfilling the wishes of their wise and good King, Adam and Eve foolishly listened to the wicked serpent and chose to establish their own rival kingdom.

And that’s the kingdom we’re born into, every one of us. “All we like sheep have gone astray,” says Isaiah 53:6, “we have turned every one to his own way.” We too listen to the wicked serpent and decide that our plan for life is better than God’s.

The story of the Bible is what the rightful King has done with His rebel subjects. You would think that He would punish them forever, and for those who persist in their rebellion, that will be their eternal fate. But in His mercy and grace, this King has put in motion a rescue mission to save some rebels and turn them into loyal and grateful subjects.

How would He bring about this transformation? He would send His Son into the world as one of them, to take their place, and bear the penalty of their rebellion. And so He rescued a man from the kingdom of the world, a man named Abram, and by grace turned him into a loyal subject, and through that man formed a family and then a nation called Israel, and through that nation sent into the world the King of kings.

Just two kingdoms, my friend, and you’re in one of them today. The kingdom of the world, you see it every day, people living like this world is theirs. The kingdom of God, you don’t see it with your eyes, not just. Right now the King is ruling in the hearts and lives of His subjects. But one day, when all He came to rescue have come home, He will return, and then every eye will see Him reigning, first in a Thousand year reign on this planet, and then forever in a new heaven and new earth.

And then it will be said, past tense, what we’re still anticipating, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”

In Revelation 15:3-4 we find a song they’ll be singing in that day. It’s called the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb, and here’s how it goes: “Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, *King of the ages*. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

My friend, know this...

2. *To be a Christian is to make it clear that the true king is your king.*

You say, “How do I escape the kingdom of this world, which is heading for certain destruction, and become part of God’s eternal kingdom?” To put it simply, you need to change kings and kingdoms. You need to stop thinking you’re the king, which the tempter wants you to think, and come to know and submit your life to Jesus the King.

Romans 10:9 says, “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Please don’t miss that word *Lord*. If you want to be saved, you must make it clear to all (that’s what “confess” means) that Jesus died and rose again to save you from your treasonous condition as a rebel, and that He now and forevermore is your *kurios*, your Lord and Master and King.

Oh, He's a wonderful King, for sure! But let the reality sink in that the One who came to save us is indeed *The King*. To be saved, you must exchange kings and kingdoms. You must make it clear that the true King is from henceforth *your* king.

Here's where politics enters in. We're told these days that faith is a very personal thing. I just read a biography of one of our previous presidents who claimed to be a born again Christian, but who time and time again refused to use his position of influence to represent the wishes of the King he professed. Separation of church and state, he insisted.

But Jesus made it clear that His subjects are not to leave Him at the door when they go to work, or to school, or to the polls. And lest we miss the point, notice Jesus' next words, "But seek first his kingdom *and his righteousness*." Don't miss that.

**D. We are commanded to seek first God's righteousness.** What does that mean? It doesn't mean we're to seek a right standing with God by our own righteous efforts. He's not saying, "Seek to make yourself righteous in God's eyes," as if positional righteousness is something we can attain by our effort. We can't.

God doesn't grade on a curve. He demands perfection, something Jesus Himself made clear back in Matthew 5:48, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Well, how is *that* going to happen? How is a sinner ever going to meet this righteous standard God requires? There are two answers to that question, man's answer and God's answer. Man's answer is what I'll call "mere religion."

1. *Mere religion offers a deficient righteousness (5:20).* Like the Pharisees did in Jesus' day. They were very religious, and most people thought for sure that if anybody was right with God, they were, for they fasted and prayed and never missed a worship service and memorized the Bible. They seemed so impressive, so *righteous*.

Not so, said Jesus. "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven (5:20)." That's what mere religion produces, a *deficient* righteousness that leads straight to hell.

So how then does a sinner become righteous? Here's God's answer. It's *Jesus*.

2. *Jesus is the standard and provision for true righteousness.* "But I say to you," said Jesus again and again. "If you harbor anger, you're guilty. If you lust, you're guilty. If you don't love your enemy, you're guilty." By His words and ultimately, by His perfect life, Jesus established the standard of righteousness, and indicted us for our failure to attain it.

But He didn't just establish the standard for it. He made a provision so sinners could experience it. You'll find it explained best in the epistles, particularly Romans and Galatians, where you'll see a word that is the sinner's best friend.

*Justification.* Justification means that God declares that a sinner who has not been righteous is now righteous in His sight, and what's more, God gives that declared-righteous-sinner the ability to start living a righteous life.

Justification is something that God must do for us, to which we contribute nothing. Justification rests entirely on the work Jesus did, His perfect life, His obedient death, and His triumphant resurrection. God says that if we trust in Jesus and what He did for us, and stop trusting in ourselves and in our so-called righteous efforts, He instantly does the following (see Romans 3:23-24). He gives us the merit of His Son's righteousness, and thereby declares us to be forever righteous in His sight, and as Romans 6 explains, He imparts to us the ability to start living a life for His pleasure, a His kingdom first life, a *righteous* life.

So when I go to the polls on Tuesday, the question to ask isn't, "Which candidate will do the best job for my bank account, or my job security, or the quality of my retirement?" That's not what I'm seeking. The question is, "Which candidate promotes the righteousness that my King says I'm to be seeking first in my life?"

You say, "Well, what if neither candidate is a Christian?" That doesn't matter. God says in Romans 13:1-5 that He established governing authorities to be ministers of righteousness. He expects them, whether they are Christian or not, to promote what is right in His sight and curb what is wrong in His sight. And that's what we should expect. Righteousness exalts a nation.

So look at the candidates. They have records. They belong to parties that have platforms. Vote for those that are promoting the kinds of righteous things that please our King.

What does the King say about refusing to protect unborn children, and redefining marriage, and borrowing money we're not sure we'll ever be able to repay to prop up lifestyles we don't need to be living? If we say He is our King, then those questions matter, questions about, not just what's best for *me*, but what is *right*. We're called to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness.

And if we do? If we fulfill our responsibility?

## II. In this promise Jesus gives us a guarantee.

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, *and all these things will be given to you as well.*" Here's the guarantee, two things.

**A. If we're seeking God's kingdom first, we already possess the greatest treasure.** Notice those words "as well." "All things will be yours *as well.*" As well as what? As well as seeking first The King and His kingdom and righteousness. Seeking The King and His kingdom and righteousness isn't what we do to get something greater. There is nothing greater! So that means if we are seeking God's kingdom first, we already possess the greatest treasure the universe has to offer.

But our King is so kind. He gives us a second guarantee. He says that...

**B. If we're seeking God's kingdom first, we can be sure that God will give us everything else we need.** "All things." What's that referring to? Verse 32—the things the pagans are running after. What's that? Verse 31—what we're going to eat, drink, and cover ourselves with (clothing, yes, and houses too). In other words, *the economy*. Jesus says that if we're seeking first things first, God's kingdom and righteousness, then God Himself will take care of the "all things" of life.

1. *He meets our temporal needs.* How you're going to feed your kids and put clothes on their backs. And most of all...

2. *He meets our eternal need.*

## Implications: Because we have this promise...two things are true.

1. *We must refuse to worry.* That's Jesus' point in this part of the sermon. "I tell you, do not worry about your life"—verse 25. "Why do you worry?"—verse 28. "So do not worry"—verse 31. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow"—verse 34. If we're seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness, then God's promise is ours. "All these things will be given to you as well." So we must refuse to be worriers who fret and fear. Our needs will be met. We have the King's word on it.

2. *We must make sure that what matters to our King matters most to us.* At home, at work, at school, at the polls, here's the question. What matter to our King? That's what should matter most to us.