

Seeking The King

The Kingdom and Righteousness of God

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We are going to begin today with a verse that you all know by heart. It was repeated so often in the Worldwide Church of God that we can all say it by rote, and yet with so much repetition, it may have lost some of its significance. It is such a foundational scripture that we must never lose sight of its meaning, and so today we are going to study into Matthew 6:33:

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

This verse is in the midst of a section on worry, but this whole chapter relates to focus, to priorities, and to putting first things first. Here, Jesus Christ spells out that the solution to anxiety about the necessities of life is to reorient one's focus away from the physical and toward the spiritual and eternal. That is an easy concept to grasp, and yet there are some implications within this verse which may not be immediately apparent.

Jesus gives the command to *seek*. The word *seek* can be used in different ways, and it is important to recognize how it is being used here. In this case, seeking is not synonymous with searching. The kingdom of God, and the righteousness of God, are not things that we can search for, or discover on our own. They are outside of normal human experience, and so they must be brought to us. Once they have been introduced, though, our seeking means to follow after, to pursue, or to endeavor toward. It involves an effort to gain, and it implies that we will encounter hardship or resistance in our endeavoring for these things. To seek is to press toward something, in order to reach it or achieve it in some way.

The first thing we are to seek is the kingdom of God. This also requires some evaluation, because the phrase “kingdom of God” is used in a number of ways. The best known (in the church) is the fulfillment of the prophecies when Jesus Christ returns, and the kingdoms of the earth become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. This is the momentous, future event toward which we are all looking, because it heralds the end of the mad rule of man, as well as our change into spirit beings. That future circumstance represents the culmination of our hope, as well as a stark reminder that the King is going to be executing judgment at His return. This is a basic meaning of **Matthew 6:33**—that we are to press toward that future Kingdom in some way.

However, there are other ways the phrase “kingdom of God” is used, and they add to the depth of this instruction. The Kingdom of God can also be a reference to Christ Himself. That might seem odd at first, but as the King of the Kingdom, He is the Kingdom's ultimate Representative. Jesus Christ embodies the policies, the interests, the will, and every other aspect of His eternal Kingdom. As a result, wherever He is, His Kingdom is present. This is why He could say (wherever He went) that “the Kingdom of God is at hand”—because He embodied the Kingdom. This is why He told the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God was in their midst. He was referring to Himself.

Now, we can apply this to **Matthew 6:33**, and it fits as well. In this light, we are told to follow after, or pursue, the King Himself—along with His righteousness. There is no higher aim or goal than that. And yet there is a subtle trap into which much of Protestantism has fallen. Especially without God's

revelation of Himself, it is very natural to focus on what the King gives and does, at the expense of what the King desires and requires. And so there is an overwhelming emphasis on the grace of God, with hardly a thought as to the totality of the obligation this puts us under.

The reality is that even though our debts are paid, our duties remain. Mankind creates a false image of God through honing in on the divine attributes he finds agreeable, while closing his eyes to the ones he does not. So even though we are to pursue the King of Kings, we are to do so with an eye toward His complete nature. A large part of seeking the Kingdom, then, is striving to know the fullness of God—which is not always going to be humanly comfortable.

A third way that the Kingdom of God is used is as a present, spiritual reality, and it is part of the fact that the Kingdom exists wherever the King is present. In **Colossians 1:13**, Paul says that the Father “has delivered us from the power of darkness and *conveyed us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love”. This conveyance is in the past tense—it has already taken place. Those who belong to Christ are already in His Kingdom. If you think about all of Christ’s parables, they typically begin with the phrase, “the kingdom of God is like...” Some of the parables do indeed relate to the future establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth. But most of the parables are about some time *before* that takes place. They are for us, in this age—and yet it says they are descriptions of the Kingdom of God. It is not here in its fullness, but God considers us to already be a part of it.

In Christ’s denunciation of the Pharisees in **Matthew 23**, one of the charges He levels is that they “shut up the kingdom of heaven against men.” He tells them, “you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who *are* entering to go in.” Even at that time, there were some who were entering the Kingdom, and were facing stiff opposition by the Pharisees. We can add to this that Peter calls us a “royal priesthood,” and James says that we are subject to the “royal law.” Things are *only* royal if they are directly associated with a King. If we are already a royal priesthood, and living by a royal law, then we are already functioning within that Kingdom. All of this shows that the Kingdom is a present reality, even though we are still waiting for it to be manifest on earth in its fullness.

This Kingdom has laws, with which we are already familiar. Its territory is not yet over the whole earth, but that is coming soon. It has citizens—people with heavenly citizenship. The citizens are those in whom the King dwells, and wherever the King is present, His Kingdom is present. And wherever the King is present—and this is a crucial element—the King is going to exercise His sovereignty, His power, and His rule. There is a vivid example of this in **Matthew 12**, which involves Jesus Christ casting out a demon, and the Pharisees wrongly attributing the exorcism to Beelzebub:

Matthew 12:25-26, 28 But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ... But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

For that last phrase, the *New English Translation* has “the Kingdom of God *has already overtaken you.*” The *Phillips’* translation says, “the Kingdom of God *has swept over you unawares.*” So **verse 28** shows the tie between the kingdom of God and the exercise of divine authority in working out the interests of the Kingdom—which in this case was deliverance from demonic possession.

Thus in some instances the Kingdom of God is a way of describing the reign of God, the rule of God, or the sovereign work of God. Jesus told the Pharisees that if He were using the Spirit of God—which is the power of God—to cast out demons, then the only conclusion could be that the Kingdom of God—the sovereign work of God—was active in their presence. But He also took this a step further, and linked the casting out of a demon with the Kingdom overtaking *them*—the *Pharisees*. In other words, He was saying that the Pharisees were part of Satan's kingdom, and that kingdom had just lost some ground.

The Kingdom of God is distinctly different from the kingdom of Satan, and from the house of the Jews, because those entities were and are hopelessly divided against themselves. That sort of division is a harbinger of future ruin. By way of contrast, the Kingdom of God is united because the Father and the Son are one. They have the same mind, the same motivation, the same purpose, and have been in harmony with each other for eternity. This is part of why their Kingdom is an eternal Kingdom—there is nothing that can break it apart, and They certainly are not going to tear it apart. Themselves by striving for more as Individuals. But demons, and the people they influence, are quite willing to tear things apart for what they can gain. Satan's kingdom is marked by internal warfare, and so its days are numbered. Our Kingdom is eternal, but we have to continually seek it if we are going to fully enter in and experience more of that divine unity.

And so—bringing this back to **Matthew 6:33**—we can see that seeking the Kingdom of God involves actively seeking the reign and rule of God in our lives. It involves inquiring into the will and the policy of our King, so that our lives can be in alignment with His. It means pursuing and using the same mind and spirit as the Father and the Son, so that we can grow in our unity with Them. It means consciously acting according to the interests of the Kingdom (rather than our own), and abiding by its laws, because that is part of how we demonstrate that we are subject to the authority of the King.

Any time we have a question about what to do, we can inquire of the King—we can call on Him, to seek His will—and then trust that He will show us how to walk so we can be in union with Him. It may not be clear all at once, but the seeking and then watching for His response are part of a beautiful process that is leading us toward the fullness of the Kingdom. However, if we find ourselves resisting the reign of God within areas of our lives, then we are divided within ourselves, with our flesh warring against the Spirit He has given. Our house is going to be on shaky ground until we again submit to God's rule in our lives.

The second thing we are told to seek is God's righteousness, and it fits right into this. Like the Kingdom of God, righteousness has a number of aspects. One of the scriptures we often use is **Psalm 119:172**, which says that *all of God's commandments are righteousness*. Following this through, if we are to seek righteousness, we have to keep the commandments. This is correct, and yet it is also incomplete. We can see this in **Romans 10:3-4**:

Romans 10:3-4 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Paul is talking about physical Israelites, whom he said had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Israel was given the very commandments that **Psalm 119** talks about. They were given instructions from the Creator Himself on how to live, so they didn't have to stumble around blindly

like the other nations. And yet the instructions, along with the zeal they had at times, were insufficient for them to be righteous before God. The result was what it says here—they sought to establish their own righteousness. They had the law, but they saw it through carnal eyes, and through the centuries the law became blurred by the opinions and reasonings of mere men. The law which was to be their tutor—and to prepare them for the Messiah—became so blurred that they could not even recognize the Divine Lawgiver when He was standing in their midst, telling them to repent. They were sure they could not be wrong, and so the problem had to be with the Messenger. They assumed they already had righteousness, and yet here Paul calls them ignorant and unsubmitted.

Most translations say that Christ is the *end* of the law, and from that arises the idea that He brought a termination to the law. What it actually means is that He is the *goal* of the law. His life and death demonstrate what the law is intended to accomplish. He lived it perfectly, and thus He is the very definition of righteousness. When we accept His sacrifice, and are conveyed into His Kingdom, and become subject to His rule, then His righteousness is imputed to us.

And yet, even with that imputed righteousness, He still requires things from us. He does not say, “*rest upon God’s righteousness,*” but rather *seek* it. It is not a one-time activity, but rather a continuous one. Even though our unrighteousness is covered with His righteousness, He still requires that we live by His royal law so that we become accustomed to living like *the King*. Yet our following of that law should never be separated from our continual seeking of the King, or else it becomes our own righteousness, even though it is based on His words. The Pharisees fully believed they kept the 8th Commandment, and yet what they would allow themselves to do, and feel justified in doing with the property of others, was vastly different from what the King intended when He wrote “*You shall not steal.*”

The fact is that we cannot live as He lives without the power—the Spirit—that He gives. And so our continual seeking of the rule of God in our lives means calling on Him to provide the means and the understanding to live in alignment with the Kingdom of God. Along these same lines, this is why the King gives such strong warnings against presumptuous sins—because they are a conscious and deliberate denigrating of the King’s righteousness in favor of the righteousness of *the self*—self-righteousness.

The Israelites were lacking the Spirit of God, by which comes the understanding of, as well as the means to submit to, the righteousness of God. We *do* have it, and yet we still stumble, and fail to live up to the royal law. The solution is not to just put forth more human effort in overcoming. What is called for is more *seeking*, because it is the King who does the overcoming in us, and the King who gives the spiritual strength to do what the human will cannot.

Noah, Daniel, and Job were righteous as a result of the rule and activity of God in their lives. I am not at all suggesting that they were casual in their approach to life, and righteousness just “happened.” But their righteousness was something that God produced in them, rather than something they accomplished with a little help here and there.

We have to do all we can, and yet also recognize that spiritual victory *must* come from a divine source, and not a human one. Along the way to that victory, we have to walk in patience and in faith, because we get frustrated that we are not yet perfect. Part of that faith is a deep sense of gratitude for the righteousness that is covering us even as He makes His righteousness a reality within us. Just like the Kingdom, the righteousness of God is a present and future reality within our lives.

Coming back to the context of **Matthew 6:33**, we are surrounded by the kingdom of the god of this world, and thus much of the evidence that we collect of how life works is based on how Satan is running things. But we have been made a part of a very different Kingdom, a Kingdom with higher standards and abundant living that this world does not grasp. We have a King who is deeply involved in the well-being of His citizens, and so there is no need for anxious thoughts about necessities. Those are things the citizens of the other kingdom worry about, because of the nature of their cruel king. But, as it says in **Psalms 34:10**, those who *seek the Lord* shall not lack any good thing.