

**“Big Story Living”**  
**Matthew 6:19-34**  
**August 30, 2015**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

I first came across this verse where Jesus says to seek first his kingdom when I was a new Christian at age 18. I was a little anxious about how Christians were to go about the whole dating and courtship process, and I sought counsel from an older and wiser Christian. After hearing me out, he directed me to this verse, inviting me to seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness and to trust God for the woman with whom I could develop a relationship that would lead to marriage. It was good advice, and it really helped me for a time, until I had a troubling thought about it. If I was trying to seek first God’s kingdom in order to find a good wife, didn’t that mean that I was still really seeking first a good wife and just using God to get there? And the truth was that I still had some anxiety about it, the very thing Jesus says we will not have if we are seeking first his kingdom.

All this potential confusion invites us to take a deeper dive into this verse. What does it really mean to seek first God’s kingdom and righteousness, and how does doing so relieve the anxiety with which we all battle on a pretty regular basis? Let me point out some things I have noticed about this passage that help me answer these questions. Notice that this contrast Jesus is drawing between on the one hand seeking first God’s kingdom and on the other hand running after life’s essentials like the pagans do, is the last of four contrasts in this passage. In each of these contrasts, Jesus lists two options among which we must choose. We must choose whether we want to store our treasures where they will be lost or where they will be secure forever, whether to pursue light or dark and whether God or money will be our master.

Another way to look at all of these contrasts is to see them as describing living in a big story versus living in our own small story. When we seek first God’s kingdom, we are living in his big story. When our lives are consumed with anxiety about food and clothing, we are living in our small story. It’s like the old account of the stonemasons who are asked what they are doing. One says he’s just getting through the day in order to earn a paycheck. The second replies that he’s erecting a wall, but only the third is living in a big story, and he answers that he’s building a grand cathedral. Jesus doesn’t ask us to seek first God’s kingdom because of a need within God, as if he needs our help, but because of a need within us. We need to have something big to give our lives to. We need meaning in life, something to live for. Earning a paycheck and just making it through to old age is not big enough. So Jesus invites us into the big story, and let’s consider that more carefully through these four contrasts.

## **I. Big Story Living with our Treasure**

Jesus contrasts the storing of our treasure on the earth with storing it in heaven. It is not a contrast between having treasure and not having treasure, but one concerned with where the treasure is stored. The place of storage is important because one of them is durable and the other is not. Treasure stored on the earth has two problems associated with it. First, the earth is not a safe place, resulting in the loss of those treasures through either corrosion or theft. It is like storing all your important papers in a damp basement that floods several times a year, or like leaving a backpack with all your money in it on top of your parked car. Second, it changes your heart in harmful ways. Jesus said that **“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”** (v. 21). If your treasure is stored on the earth, your heart will be focused exclusively on earthly things. To have a heart focused exclusively on earthly things is to live in a little story that reduces life to nothing more than survival or comfort. It leads to loss of meaning and loss of hope for the future. To store your treasure in heaven is just the opposite, leading to the safety of the treasure and leading to a heart that is properly focused on the big picture of God’s kingdom.

So what does it mean specifically to store your treasure on the earth? It doesn’t mean that Christians can’t have savings accounts, because the Bible tells us to learn from the lowly ant in storing up food for future needs. It doesn’t mean that we can’t enjoy the good things of this life that God provides, because the Scriptures commend that, as long as we have thankful hearts for those things. I think what Jesus is forbidding when he speaks against storing up treasures on the earth is the selfish accumulation of goods, living in the little story of a life whose highest good is your own comfort and satisfaction.

What does it mean, then, to store up treasures in heaven? It means to live in the big story of giving yourself to that which will have eternal benefit. Since you can’t take any money with you, living for the mere accumulation of money is not wise. What you can take with you to heaven is yourself. So giving priority to the development of Christlike character and of faith, hope and love, which Paul said abide forever, is a wise storing of treasure in heaven. Organizing your life around the priority of people coming to faith in Christ is part of this. Making time to cultivate relationships with unbelievers, praying for them and learning to share the gospel with them, is storing up heavenly treasure. Also included would be generous giving to the progress of the gospel within your church and in the missionary efforts of the church.

## **II. Big Story Living with Light and Darkness**

In the next verses, Jesus uses the metaphor of light and darkness to contrast this big story living and little story living. The point of the metaphor is

that the eye affects the whole body. If the eye doesn't work properly, it affects more than the eye, bringing darkness into the whole life. If the eye is good, it brings good not just to the eye but to the whole body. The key to this passage lies in understanding what Jesus means by the healthy eye and the bad eye. The word for bad is a word that can mean 'evil,' and there was such a thing in Jewish idiomatic expression as the "evil eye." It referred to the miserly and stingy person. So I believe what Jesus is saying here is that the covetous and stingy person can't see where he is going.

This situation of covetousness bringing darkness to the whole body is made even more serious by the last sentence of verse 23. **"If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"** I think D. A. Carson is right when he says that Jesus is speaking ironically here when he refers to the "light in you." They only think they have light within. It is bad to be blind, but what is worse is to be blind and not know that you're blind. That's the effect of covetousness upon us.

Jesus is dealing here with our vision, not vision in the literal sense but in the sense we might use it in the planning process. We use it to describe a desirable future. What do you see as a desirable future for yourself? If it is nothing more than the accumulation of earthly riches, you are living in your own little story and you are inviting darkness to fill your entire life.

### **III. Big Story Living with our Master**

The third contrast concerns who your master is. It is possible to have more than one employer, but not more than one master. Masters require ultimate allegiance, making it impossible to divide one's loyalty between two masters. Yet that is exactly what is often attempted between the two masters of God and money. To update the metaphor a little, just as a car can only have one driver, either God or money is going to be in the driver's seat of our lives. Someone said to me once that they believed giving a tithe to God meant that they could do whatever they wanted to with the remaining 90%. This person was trying to serve two masters. But in reality he still only had one master, and it was money. He was paying off God with his tithe in order to do whatever he wanted with his money.

It is news to some people that money can even be a master. Someone might object by saying, "I don't have any master because I do whatever I want to do." The problem is that doing what you want takes money, unless all you want to do is sit around and do nothing. So to say that you do what you want is to put money in the driver's seat of your life. When you do so, you make your life very small. The reason is that your life becomes all about yourself and your desires. It becomes a small world with you in the center.

There is more at stake than might first be grasped, because Jesus says that whichever master you decide to serve will lead you to despise the other. If you choose to serve God, to let him be in the driver's seat of your life, you are saying to master money, "I will not give you my ultimate allegiance. You are a false god, and the true God has authority over you." On the contrary, if we make money our master, we say the same thing to God. "I don't need you. If I have enough money, all my desires can be met just fine."

#### **IV. Big Story Living with our Ambitions**

I want us to spend most of our time on this last contrast for the simple reason that Jesus spends most of his time on it. It is a contrast between living in God's big story or our own little story in the area of ambition or desire. We were created to seek big and important things, and there is nothing bigger or more important than God's kingdom. Jesus calls us here to the big ambition of seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness instead of seeking first the necessities of life that the pagans seek first of all.

Jesus is teaching us that our problem is not desires that are too big, but desires that are too small. To seek the material things needed for mere existence is too small a thing to define our lives. We were made for something much bigger, for the kingdom of God. Imagine someone who gets addicted to playing solitaire on his computer. His whole life is spent trying to get faster and better at the game. He skips meals and sleep, and eventually decides to quit his job in order to have more time to devote to improving his solitaire skills. What a waste to live in such a little story! Not to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, though, is about as foolish as living for solitaire.

How can you know that you are seeking first God's kingdom instead of seeking first the necessities of life? Jesus spends a good bit of time talking about something all of us know too much about, anxiety. He brings up this whole matter of anxiety because it is a symptom of living only for the small desires associated with mere existence. Small story living is the soil in which anxiety flourishes. The soil that is toxic to anxiety is seeking God's kingdom first and looking to God in faith to provide our needs.

Jesus speaks of two features of the kind of faith that gets rid of anxiety. Do any of you battle anxiety? Check for a pulse if you answer "no." For those of us willing to engage this fight against anxiety, Jesus reminds us first that we have a heavenly Father who is both able and willing to provide for us. He looks to nature to make his point. We are first called to consider the birds. No bird has a savings account. They don't get a windfall at harvest season that they can store up for coming months. They must forage for their food every single day. In spite of this weakness, one not shared by humanity, God provides for them. What an amazing statement of God's utter control over his world. I wonder how

many birds there are in the world. I don't know, but I'm sure that there are many times more birds than people. Yet God cares for every single one. We must remember, too, that people are far more important to God than birds. If he takes such care with lesser creatures, surely he will care even more for his image bearers. And then Jesus turns to the flowers. Flowers are unable to work. They are required to be passive. But look what God does for this part of creation that is unable to engage in the activity God normally uses to provide for us, the activity of work. He doesn't just provide minimally, but splendidly in the beauty of these flowers. And they are here for only a short time. If God provides so generously for flowers that are here only a short time, how much more will he provide for his children who are here for eternity. God is able to do these things, and by contrast, worry can do none of them.

A second feature of the kind of faith that chases away anxiety is that it trusts God in the present. Jesus ends by saying, **"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."** Instead of focusing our attention on the problems of tomorrow over which we are powerless, Jesus tells us to focus our attention on today, which is the only day we can live today. There will be enough challenges in living today, and Jesus tells us to trust God for his grace for those troubles. One of the big problems with anxiety is that it draws us into focusing on a set of problems we can do nothing about and diverts us from focusing our attention on the things we can do something about. We are able to do something about the problems of today, and those are the very problems God calls us to address as we trust him today.

How do we obey this verse when, of necessity, the vast majority of our waking hours must be spent in the provision of the things Jesus tells us not to seek? We go to our jobs, we prepare meals, we pay bills, we take care of our houses, and we are left with only a few hours a day beyond that. It would be wrong for us not to do these things, but we do them with our eye on the bigger goal of seeking God's kingdom first. They are not ultimate but simply provide the circumstances of where we work within God's kingdom. So your goal at work is not just a paycheck. Your goal in raising children isn't mere survival. In all of these, we are to seek first God's good kingdom.

## **CONCLUSION:**

What does it look like to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? It means to remember the big story of what God is doing in the world and give yourself to that story. God is bringing in his kingdom of peace through Jesus Christ. By his great goodness, he gives us the privilege of joining him in this, not because he needs us, but because we need to attach ourselves to this big story. We need not to live any longer in anxiety, but to live instead for his kingdom. Will you choose to live in this big story?