

Harris Creek Baptist Church
John Elmore
Series: Upside Down Kingdom
July 21, 2024

Worry and A Divided Life

Matthew 6: 19-34

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust 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. 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? 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. ³⁴ Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Hey, good morning, Harris Creek! Good to be with you all. You all, people of God, chosen, elect, adopted, washed by the blood of Jesus and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This is the gathering of the church for the proclamation of His word and the exalting of Jesus Christ. It's good to do. And if it's the first time joining us, if you were brought by a friend or a neighbor or a coworker, we just want to thank you. We know you've got a lot of choices, you could go a lot of places, you could have slept in, but you're here, and we believe that God has something for you today. So, listen, by His spirit, He's going to speak to you.

You already see a ladder here on stage. [points to a small step ladder on stage] So, I want to get to that. I arrived here from Springfield, Missouri in 1994. You can do the math, or I'll save you

the time, I'm 48. But I showed up and when I came to Baylor's campus, Penland room 212, I believe, 212 or 211. I can't remember exactly. But staying there, and on the weekends your freshman year, everybody just scatter shot, went to their own hometowns. I'm left there alone in the dorm. I'm like, "Dude this is not going to fly." I had friends in high school, we had a crowd. Now I'm like, a nobody. I was like, "I got to fix this." So, I saw a ladder there that I could climb. It was the fraternity. I'm like, "Okay, all right. You don't have to be an idiot to figure this out. I'm going to go through rush. I'm going to get a bid from the fraternity that'll make me a part of something." I'm just going to start climbing that ladder. [steps onto the first rung of the ladder] I want to hold office within that fraternity. Not just enough to be a part of it. I want to lead it, in part. [takes another step up the ladder] I'll be a service chair. I'll be mission trip chair. [continues to climb the ladder] I'm going to try to get Pledge Master, which it was President or Pledge Master. President had a lot of responsibilities. Pledge Master was a people person. I'm like, "I'm going to choose that one." [reaches the top of the ladder] Some of you guys are like, "How's your insurance policy, right now?" [laughs]

I just was climbing this ladder for me. That wasn't enough, it was like "All right, senior year, let's get triple crown. Let's go All University Sing. Let's get number one there. Let's get number one float. Let's win intramurals." We were going and going and going for it all. At the end of that, got to it, graduated and somewhere in my twenties, I took my fraternity jersey, my certificate, some of the, I don't even know what to call it, memorabilia, and I threw it away. It went into a dumpster in Austin, Texas. [climbs down from the ladder] All the stuff that I valued so much to fulfill and meet all my needs somewhere in my 20s was like, "What is this?" I didn't want to be like an Aggie wearing one of those rings like, "Oh, you peaked too soon." [laughter] "You bought a maroon car. Man, you're all in." I was like, "Nah, I have to get rid of this." What am I going to do? Hang it up in my office and be like, "Dude, glory days. Like Uncle Rico. Give it up, man." I love the Aggies, you're great, I love you. Favorite community college in Texas. I think it's amazing. [laughter]

But here's the reality. At some point in time, it was when I was 30, I had surrendered to Christ. He'd gotten me sober from alcoholism. No joke. I was a part of this year long discipleship program. I was on Baylor's campus to come and tell other students like, "Hey, there's this thing when you graduate college, you can get disciplined, learn about the nations and missions and grow in your knowledge and love for the Lord and His Word." I'm on campus, 30 years old, I'm walking down 5th Street, Penland on my left, SUB (Student Union Building) on the right. Y'all, I'm by those big sweeping staircases. I start weeping. Grown man, 30 years old, weeping. Because I was like, "I squandered my years here. All four years, some of the most pivotal, impactful years, and I squandered them seeking after this ladder of a fraternity [climbs one step of the ladder on stage and steps back down]. If only I would have sought to further the Kingdom of God instead of the kingdom of John." And the fraternity wasn't the problem. The problem was me; I was trying to fill an ache in my soul by ascending this social ladder, and it all went in the trash, and I wept that day.

But the truth is I was climbing that ladder, but there's other ladders we climb because when I graduated, Baylor's I was like, "All right, write the right resume, get the right internship, get the right job, get the sales career, make more money." That was a different ladder. There's a financial ladder that some of us are climbing. It's like, "All right, I want to be financially independent

from my parents.” You're 30. You should be. You want to get that; you want to go from the hourly wage to the salaried wage; and then you want to get the matching 401(k); and then you want to be financially secure, not when you're 65, you want to hit that by 50, like whatever that financial ladder is.

There also the kid ladder. I want to have kids, that's step number one. I want these kids to be so proper and have manners and a firm handshake and look them in the eye. I want to make sure they get straight A's. I want to make sure they get the full ride to college. That's the ladder we're climbing for our kids and putting that pressure on them.

Then if some of you are like, “Man, that doesn't relate to me at all. I don't have kids. That doesn't translate to me.” I think for the younger crowd, it's like “No, I've got my Instagram account. And how many followers do I have? [takes a step up the ladder] And am I going to buy my blue check or am I going to earn my blue check? And how many likes did I get on that? [takes another step up the ladder] How many comments, how many DMs this week? Why don't I have more activity? How come that person has more followers than me?” And you're ascending a social ladder [steps down the ladder again].

Every single one of those ladders, there's an end to them. All that is going to get pushed into a dumpster at some point in time; it had no value. But here's the reality. There's a second ladder. [uncovers a second, larger ladder on stage] Jesus says in the scripture, “No, there's another ladder, there's another path.” [sets up the larger ladder beside the smaller ladder] This one's taller, I'm going to make sure this is locked. I don't want any accidents up here. Jesus says there's a different Kingdom. There's the world's kingdom [points to the smaller ladder], and then there's this Kingdom. [points to the larger ladder, then places one foot on each ladder to straddle in between them] You're going to see in the scriptures that He invites us to choose. He doesn't invite us to choose. He says we must choose.

As we continue this series, the Upside Down Kingdom, He's going to be like, “Hey, I know the world says climb these ladders. That this is where you put your emphasis, your focus. [points to the smaller ladder] This is where you'll find treasure and worth and value and status. This is it.” And Jesus says, [climbs the larger ladder] “No, this one, you follow Me. Don't follow the world but follow the Kingdom. Follow Me. This is where you put everything. This is where you follow Me to eternal life in this life. And you just keep following Me and not this” [steps down the larger down and points to smaller ladder]. And in this passage, He's going to say, “I know there's the temptation to have both. [straddles both ladders] He draws this dichotomy. He says it's binary, it's either or, it's not both and. He says you get to choose one. [steps onto the smaller ladder] You will either pursue the world and its treasures, which one day will be trash, [steps onto the larger ladder] or you will pursue Christ and His Kingdom and his righteousness.

There's going to be three questions that are put before all of us today, self-included. Three questions in the passage of this scripture. As we're in the series, Upside Down Kingdom, Matthew 6:19-34. You're going to see it on the screen as we go through it. You can turn there in your Bibles. But these three questions that Jesus poses, I'll put them to you like this. The first is, will you pursue trash or treasure? Earthly trash, heavenly treasure, first choice. Second choice in

this life, will you pursue greed or God? That's the second choice. What will be your ambition, your motivation? Who will pilot your soul? The driving force of your reality, greed or God? Then the third choice, as you live, while you live, will you be consumed with worry for these things or worship in the Kingdom? Trash or treasures, God or greed, worry or worship. Let's begin, verse 19:

“Do not lay up treasures for yourself on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.” This would be represented by this ladder, [points to smaller ladder] the worldly earthly treasures. He says, **“but lay up treasures for yourself in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, where thieves do not break in and steal.”**

So, J.P. last week, as he talked to us about how to spot a fake Christian, it says, “As you practice these righteous acts, do so not in order to be seen by others.” That if you're doing them to be seen by others, if that's your heart motivation, then you've received your reward in full, your earthly treasure. If that was your motive. He says, “Instead, look to your Father who sees in secret, and you'll be rewarded.” Do you know in that past passage that we just came out of last week, listen, he says “reward, reward, reward, reward, reward, reward, reward”. Seven times reward is mentioned for these righteous acts. Not to be seen by others, but your Father who sees in secret. He's telling us, seek the Kingdom, His righteousness, and there is this coming reward. These [points to smaller ladder], ultimately, through the passage of time, will become trash. These [points to larger ladder] will become treasure, heavenly treasure, enjoyed forever in the presence of God, and all glory for Him. And so, Jesus says, “Choose one.” Don't lay up treasures on earth, lay them up in Heaven. Will you choose temporal trash or eternal treasure? One will be trash, one will outlast. We get to pick one.

In 2 Corinthians 5:10, it's a passage that we don't look to a lot, because we focus on our eternal salvation. [verse on screen]

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

That we have placed our faith in Jesus Christ, who came, this is the first step of faith, [steps onto larger ladder] crossing over from the world [steps onto smaller ladder] to the Kingdom [steps back onto larger ladder]. Place your faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, believing that He lived a sinless life, Son of God, eternally begotten Son of God, fully man, fully God, who died a death on the cross for our sins, was buried, and raised again. That is how we transfer from the world [points to smaller ladder] to the Kingdom [points to larger ladder, then steps off the larger ladder back onto stage], through faith. In His grace for the salvation of our soul. But there is a judgment coming for every believer. Which is strange, right? We typically think about judgment for the unbeliever, that's eternity in Hell rather than Heaven. It's why we share the Gospel, not wanting anyone to perish, but instead to come to saving grace in Jesus.

But, it says there's a judgment for the believer. Listen, 2 Corinthians 5:10: **“For we all,”** writing to the Church of Corinth, we all, believers, **“must appear before the judgment seat of Christ.”** Why? I thought we weren't going to have a salvific judgment of Heaven or Hell. It's not that.

Listen. **“So that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body.”** The time that you've been given on earth, whether good or evil, it says that there is a reward coming what is due. These are the seven rewards that were talked about last week by J.P., that when we do these righteous acts, your Father who sees them in Heaven, there's a reward coming. We're going to be evaluated. Did you live your life for the world, or did you live your life for the Kingdom? It's the choice. It's the dichotomy. It's the binary decision and it's not a once and for all. It's every single day. It's every single hour that there are going to be opportunities to pursue the world or to pursue the Kingdom. And one day we'll stand before Jesus and He'll say, “How did you steward your life for Me?” The times that you stewarded it for Me and My glory, be rewarded. I'm not talking about “Okay, so I have to quit my job and join a church staff and become a monk.” No! It's like whether you're a CEO, be a CEO for the glory of God. If you're a stay-at-home mom, be a stay-at-home mom for the glory of God. A student under the glory of God. Do the best that you can do for God's glory, giving Him all the glory, asking Him for the ability that you're doing everything that you do, whether you eat or drink or whatever, do it all for the glory of God. That is how one day when you stand, cross over into eternity to come, stand before Jesus and He'll say, “How did you steward your life for Me?” With whatever it is, occupationally, relationally, financially, socially, be like, “Ah, you did that for Me, by Me, through Me, unto Me. Here's your reward”, or if it's “No, that was for you,” and so, moth and rust, they devoured that. That's trash. But these acts, these prayers, this fasting, this giving, this sharing of the Gospel, those are eternal rewards. Trash or treasure.

1. *Trash or Treasure*

Jim Elliott, who was a missionary to the Auca Indians in South America, he said this, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep [the earthly treasures] in order to gain what he cannot lose.” Jim Elliot - who gave his life to share the gospel with the Auca Indians - they murdered him there while he was taking the Gospel to them. He said, “He is no fool who gives earthly, worldly treasure, time, emphasis, focus, who gives what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose.” You can't lose. Jesus says, “This, moth and rust, can't touch. Guarded in Heaven for you.”

Our family this past year undertook two significant building projects. One almost did me in, and we undertook two significant building projects. One was when we moved here to Waco. The house we bought was 30 years old, and we needed to make some updates to it. And honestly, some of those were just desires and not needs. Perfectly fine house, but we made it ours. The other was spring break on a beach, and we built sandcastles. [laughs] One project is “Hey, we're going to live here, so we're going to invest in this.” The other was, “Ah, I mean it's fun for the kids, we're going to make it.” We came to the same beach, a little while later, and the kids, after meticulously working hard on it, the kids are like, “What happened to the sandcastles?” There were just humps and mounds there in the sand after creating all the moat, the turret, the doors, the secret passage out the back, so much attention and detail was gone. As the tide came in, washed it back out.

And in the same way, Jesus is saying, “Hey, you're putting emphasis on sandcastles.” Things that are here today, gone tomorrow. The passage of time, the tide of time, is going to hit that and wash it away. And what I'm not saying is to not focus on your work, or your marriage, or your relationships, or to not have Instagram, or to not have a fraternity, or a sorority, or those things.

It's just to do them unto the Lord. That is how they will withstand time. And you'll be eternally rewarded with treasure in Heaven. And we know from Revelation that any treasure we receive in Heaven will be cast before Jesus. The elders cast their crowns and say, "This is all for your glory, Jesus, apart from You, I'd never even be here, let alone have these. So, they're all back to You." It's just this cyclical glory unto the Lord.

But the reason why I'm building that sandcastle, and I don't care a lot about it, I care a lot about the one we're going to live in. We're probably going to live in this one, 30, 40, 50 years. The sandcastle, it's here today, gone tomorrow. And Jesus is like, "That's how I want you to live." I want you to think you're going to live a really long time in Heaven. So, invest here [points to the larger ladder] and not there [points to the smaller ladder]. Those are sandcastles. These are going to be eternal. They're going to be eternal. Trash or treasure, which will you live for?

And I think His audience there, I think us as the audience now, think, "Well I don't think it has to be either or. I think I can pretty much live both. [straddles one foot on each ladder] You're telling me, don't store up treasures on earth, store them up in Heaven. But I think, how about I just go both, Jesus?" And He's going to answer the question, He's going to say, "No you can't serve two masters. [steps down from both ladders] You can't have both. Your heart can only be given over to one." So, He continues in verse 21 and says,

"For where your treasure is there, your heart will be also." They're inextricably intertwined. There is no both and. **"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 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 that darkness! 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."** Here is the binary decision, it's either or. **"You cannot serve God and money."**

So, the second choice that Jesus puts before us is God or greed.

2. *God or Greed*

Will your heart motivation, your sole, S-O-L-E, sole motivation, be God or greed? It says you can't serve two masters. Jesus says this, and so He invites us, your soul, S-O-U-L motivation must be this, that this is my heart's motivation after the Kingdom and the rest, come what may. That I will not have sole motivation for the things of this world. It will not be greed. I will choose God. And so, He says, "Who's going to be your master? Who's going to be the one calling the shots in your life? Will it be the mission of God or materialism of the world? Will you be a slave to righteousness, or will you be chasing... we've created this idiomatic phrase, the "almighty dollar," chasing the almighty dollar. We attribute deity to the almighty dollar. How crazy is that, that we have a phrase? And here Jesus says, "You will either have God or greed."

You can't serve both God and money. You must choose one. Will you be a treasure seeker or a Kingdom seeker? He says, "You've got to choose." And I think what we do is I will trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins. [puts feet on the larger ladder] I don't want to go to hell

when I die. And I want a good job. [puts one foot on the smaller ladder] And I want financial independence [moves foot one step up the smaller ladder] And I want to make a name for myself [moves foot another step up the smaller ladder, makes grunting sound] and how ridiculous do I look right now? [awkwardly straddles both ladders unevenly] And it's dangerous and it looks stupid. Somebody is going to post this on Instagram and be like, "What was that about?" [laughter] And it looks completely out of balance. No joke, I had to have Craig Cunningham pop my back in between services because I hurt something. It's like you look out of balance. You look crazy. [steps off both ladders back onto stage] And this is just me on two ladders. I think the world is looking at us like this [straddling the ladders unevenly] and being like, "Hey, I know you trusted in Jesus, but your motivation, your ambition looks out of balance. You're stretched out there, bro. You say you're sold out for Jesus, but it seems like you're sold out for the things of this world and materialism. I think you're building a kingdom for yourself instead of the Kingdom of God." [steps off both ladders] Can't be out of balance. Will it be greediness or godliness? The greed will be garbage. The righteousness will be rewarded.

And the reason why I'm choosing greed is because this is not an anti-money message. The Bible speaks a lot about financial stewardship. The Bible talks about the ant who sees winter coming, and without being told stores up, "Okay I know the uncertainties of life, so I'm going to..." It commends the ant. In Ecclesiastes, it says, "Cast your bread on many waters, it's talking about investments, for you don't know which one will return to you." It's stewardship. Money is not the problem, just like fraternity wasn't the problem. It's that, it's not that things are bad, it's that they make really bad gods. And so, He says, "Are you going to choose God or greed?"

When I was in the third grade, I went to Russ Korn's birthday party at Skateport. They have this plexiglass box with an industrial fan that you stood on, and in there were single dollar bills and little coupons for a free hour of skating, or free snow cone, or free, you know what I'm talking about, free sweet tarts, whatever it was. They'd give you a minute, big shot clock above it, he'd step in there, door shuts, and it's just [makes swirling noise] this swirl hurricane of dollar bills and coupons. And he's grabbing them and we're all cheering and Russ steps out, and I think he's got \$13 and a snow cone. After all that frenetic pace, and I think by the end of the week, maybe by the end of the skate party, he had squandered it all. And it's not like he walked out and was like, "You get a dollar, and you get a dollar, and you get a dollar." It was just Russ and his 13 bucks.

And I think what God has done is He has placed us into this little sphere, and there's a lot swirling. There's swirling dollar bills and status and occupational opportunity to put our name on the sign that says, "I built this. I did this. Look at me. My kingdom." Opportunities to just build our own little kingdom, our own little tower of Babel and swirling around us there are opportunities to ask your waitress how you can pray for them. Nobody even sees them or looks up from the menu. "We're going to pray before the meal. How can I pray for you?" "Would you want to join me at church on Sunday?" to your coworker. To invite a coworker, a roommate, a fraternity brother, a sorority sister, and say, "Hey, let's go to lunch, let's go to coffee, would you share your story with me?" And inevitably, they're going to say, "Okay, that's my story, why don't you share your story with me?" And you're going to be able to share your testimony and the Gospel. That all those opportunities are swirling also, and Jesus is like, "Which ones are you grabbing? They're all around you!" Are you going to live for greed or God?

Laura and I talk about this. When things get tight, we're like, "Alright, hey, things are tight, we need to hit the brakes on finances." And then there will be this opportunity that'll cross our plate of another individual in need. And the knee jerk is we said we were going to cut back because things are tight. And it's like no, these are different. That one's spending [points to smaller ladder]. This one's giving [points to larger ladder]. That's different. So, this is a good use of money when things are tight, things are tighter for them so let's give there. There's a difference between spending or getting and giving in generosity for the Kingdom. And there's times also, truly, where I'm like, "Well this one I'm going to get the little thing at the end of the year that said I gave to taxes, and that's going to help me out that way. And this one, if it's just somebody in need I'm not getting a tax thing at the end of the year." And there's this internal wrestle, and it's like, "No, put that to death, who cares?" Give here. [taps larger ladder] That we are after God and His Kingdom, and not consumed by greed.

In verse 22 and 23, it says, "The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light." This is your outlook on life. This is your perspective. That's what eyes do. Eyes are how you see the world. And so, He's talking about your spiritual perspective. Do you see it as a worldly accumulation or as a Kingdom one? How do you view this life that you live in? Said otherwise, your focus will be your future. Because He says, "If you focus on the Kingdom, then you're going to be welcomed in with treasures in Heaven that moth and rust don't destroy. Or if your focus is the world, it's going to be trash." Your focus is your future. And, as we think about our future, "Man, one day I'm going to spend eternity in Heaven", then that informs our focus. For those who have been given eternal life, we live then for eternal things. We don't live for greed; we live for God.

And so, your outlook will be your outcome. Your outlook on life will be your outcome one day when you stand before Heaven. And toxic people are created by toxic outlooks. And a toxic outlook will create a toxic person. This is what Jesus says when He says, "If your eyes are dark, then how great is the darkness." If your outlook on life, you guys know these people, filled with negativity and grumbling and complaining, and everybody's out to get me, and "Oh, here goes another thing. Everything's always broken. Everybody, look at all this." It's just like this Eeyore fatalistic mentality. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy where it's just "the world's just out to get me." And here, specifically, contextually, is if your eyes are focused on the world, He doesn't say, "You're a child of light, child of the Kingdom, [straddles both ladders] and if your eyes are bad, well it's just kind of dim. He says, "How great is the darkness if your eyes are on the world." [steps onto the larger ladder] Instead, He says, "You're a child of the light, come in to the light, pursue the Kingdom." That is what we were after and who we were after." [steps off the larger ladder back onto stage]

After our first kid, we were broke. I transitioned from business into ministry, so broke. And I needed a new car, because the car I was driving was this old beater from when I was in seminary. And I saw this car, it was \$2,100 a Mitsubishi Montero. And I knew a buddy who was good with cars. I was like, "Hey, will you come check this thing out with me?" It was at night, we pull up to the bank, I go to the ATM. I was like, "Alright, I need to pull out \$2,100, because if I want it, I need to get it then so somebody else doesn't." So I go, and it says my daily limit is \$1,000. Which was probably good, it's probably all we had, but I get my thousand, and I'm like "Nevermind, I'll hit you up tomorrow, I have to get another thousand tomorrow, I'm not going to

be able to buy it anyway, so we'll just, we'll reschedule for tomorrow.” He's like, “No, hang on,” puts his thing in, gets out eleven hundred, and is like, “Let's go look at the car we'll figure it out.” We end up buying the car, and the next day I'm like, “Alright, well hey, I'm going to go to the bank, I have to pay you back your eleven hundred.” And he's like “Nah, it's good.” “No, what do you mean?” He's like, “No, it's all God's money anyway. It's fine.” I'm like, “You can't buy more than half my car.” He's like, “Look, it's okay. God's got me, God's got you. It's all His anyway.” I'm like, “No, you can't.” And truly, years later, I think as of recent, as last year, I was like, “Hey, the Montero, really we're in an okay place now. I need to pay you back.” And he's like, “Bro, no.” You know who that friend was? It's your pastor, Jonathan Pokluda.

And so, the proverb says (Proverbs 11:24), **“One person gives freely, yet gains even more, another withholds what he should give, but comes only to poverty.”** God has made us to be this conduit of His grace and not a keeper of it, that we would be led by God and not our own greed. This open handedness. And so, in verse 24, he says, **“no one can serve two masters. He will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”** You can't straddle the two. You've got to pick one, to choose one.

Dale Wallace, who oversees our college ministry here for MCC, TSTC and Baylor, we're talking about this passage, and he goes, “Do you realize the word priority never had a plural form until the 1900s?” I was like, “No, what are you talking about?” He was like, “Yeah, there wasn't a plural form of the word priority, priorities, until the 1900s, advent industrial revolution.” Because then it became like, “Oh, things are blown up. Now I've got multiple priorities. I've got to do this and this and this, and these are my priorities. The Latin word for a priority is prior, and it means first. Meaning, there is one thing that is first. One. One singular thing gets your attention first. For all time, there was only one first. Then in the 1900s, and the industrial revolution, and the materialism that came with it, and the greed, and the getting, and the building, and the doing. Then it was like we literally invented a word, priorities. I have multiple firsts. This is a first, this is a first, this is a first, this is a first. And it's illogical, you can't have multiple firsts. By the literal sense of it, they're no longer first. You can have one first. And Jesus is saying, “You get one first.” God or greed. Choose one. You can't have both.

And so, in Mark 12:30 it says, **“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul all with all your mind and with all your strength.”** Amen. The refrain in that passage, “you shall love the Lord”, which means master, he calls the shots, with *all* your soul, *all* your mind, *all* your strength, *all* your heart. The repeated language is “all your.” It's not, “All right, hey, God, I'm going 50/50 on this deal. You know what? I'm going to be generous. I'm going to go 90/10.” He says “All. All.” Choose all. Whatever you have, that it's all for the Kingdom and His glory. He's calling us to a decision that it's all, everything we have unto Him and for His glory.

And the paradoxical nature of Christianity is that when we are owned or mastered by God, He sets us free. To be owned by God is to be free. Yet, when we go after money, we're actually enslaved. As Henry David Thoreau said, “We don't own things, things own us.” But this one

[points to the smaller ladder] you might get, and you will get slavery in return. This one [points to the larger ladder] as you give, you get set free. Will you choose God or greed?

Now, I believe through the progression of the passage, as Jesus is talking about this, He is like, “Treasures in earth, treasures in Heaven”, and they're like, “Well, I'll go both.” He's like “No, you can't, you can serve one master. God or greed.” I think they would have been like, “Jesus, then who's going to worry about me? Are you literally telling me not to work?” No. The Bible says if you don't work, you shouldn't eat. The Bible's not against work. It's not against fraternities. It's not against being a CEO or a stay-at-home, mom. It says, “Whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. And they would've said “Wait, you're telling me I can't serve two masters? I can't serve money? I've got to serve God? I have to store up treasures in Heaven? Then what am I going to do about what to eat or wear or drink? Who's going to worry about that?” And He is like, “I will. I will, follow Me. I got you. I got you.” And so, He walks them through this final passage.

“Therefore I tell you”, verse 25, “do not be anxious about your life” ...this would have been the totality of life. He's going to unpack a few of them, but He's like, “Anything in life: your job, where you're going to live, how you're going to make the mortgage, if you're going to get a spouse one day that you desire, if you're going to have children, whatever your life is, don't be anxious about it. Look to Me, My Kingdom and My righteousness. He says, “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? 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?”

God's got them, do you think He doesn't have you? You're made in the image of God. You've got an immortal soul that will spend eternity in Heaven or hell. Do you think He's not concerned about you? He's concerned about the sparrow, my goodness, how much more you. Therefore, it translates to us, we don't have to be anxious. Then He says, **“and which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to a span of life?”** Your worry is worthless. It's fruitless. It's just wrapping you around the axle. It benefits nothing. All it is a colossal waste of time and your mental energy. It's got you so wound up, and it doesn't do anything. All that worrying, you didn't even add an hour. It was fruitless. **“And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is today alive and tomorrow thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ The Gentiles seek after all these things.”**

Why do the Gentiles seek after all these things? Because they don't believe in the one true God. They're following false gods, dead religions, and they're like, “I don't know if He's up there, and I don't know if He's even good. I don't know if He can be trusted. It seems like I've got to do these works of good in order to get His favor, which is a complete farce and against the Gospel. So of course they're chasing after them. The Gentiles are chasing after them because they don't believe in God. He's like “You can't be like that.” You believe in God, therefore, you shouldn't

look like them. **“For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your Heavenly Father knows you need them all.”** But here is the solution. You're like, “If I'm not going to worry about it, then who is?” **“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”** The third choice that Jesus gives us is, will your life be one of worry or worship.

3. *Worry or Worship*

Elizabeth Cheney wrote a poem in the 1800s. It says this, I think it'll be on the screen, “Said the robin to the sparrow, ‘I should really like to know why these anxious human beings rush about and worry so. Said the sparrow to the robin; ‘Friend, I think that it must be that they have no Heavenly Father such as who cares for you and me’.” It's this personification of the birds talking, and they're watching this frenetic pace of the world, and the human beings rushing to and fro, so consumed by the worries of life, as if they're like rubbing their wings together in curiosity, “Why are they so panicked? I don't sow or store or reap and God takes care of us every day. Why? Oh! It must be because they don't have a Heavenly Father like we do.” It's an indictment from even looking at the birds.

So, know that worry is worthless. Worry is temporary agnosticism. It's temporary agnosticism. “I don't know, maybe there's a God, maybe He sees me, maybe He might come through, I don't really know, and so I better worry about it. I better fret about it. I better see what I can do, because I don't know that He's actually going to come through.” It's temporary agnosticism. Don't be like the Gentiles who do not know God. Your Father knows your needs before you ask.

And so, worry can be like prayer. Prayer is worry put to work. You're still mentally consumed on something, but instead of it going inward, it goes upward. Prayer is worry put to work. You've got these things on your mind, and you're taking them to God and being like, “I'm going to seek first your Kingdom and your righteousness, and I'm going to take You at Your Word when you say, all these things will be added unto me. Maybe not my wants, but certainly my needs.” And one day, my wants, when I walk into Paradise.

Here's the thing. As Jesus says, **“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.”** The righteousness is like personal holiness. The Kingdom is God's business here on earth. That we would be about setting ourselves apart, holy unto the Lord, and then, instead of spiritual narcissism, would look outward towards others and be like, “I'm going to live on mission for God in whatever context He has me. Whether it's the university, or the bank, or the classroom, or the home, I'm going to live on mission. His Holiness, His Kingdom. That's going to be my sole pursuit.”

And here's the reality, we don't have to worry about these things anyway, because biblically, from cover to cover, He's the one that does it. It says in Deuteronomy chapter 8, that God is the One who gives you the ability to produce wealth. You might think “No, my degree, the way I grind, the way I'm good with people. I can crunch the numbers. I can find the loophole. That's what makes me produce wealth.” God would say, “You're self-deceived. I give you the ability to

produce wealth,” Deuteronomy chapter 8. In Psalm 127, the one that says, “Unless the Lord watches over the city, they watch in vain. Unless the Lord builds the house, you labor in vain.” Then it says, “In vain, think about worry, in vain, you rise early and stay up late, eating the bread of anxious toil.” Even the bread you're eating, you're like, “Ah, it's just wracked by anxiety.” When you look at the Hebrew, in the NET translation, they went back to the grammar, syntax, all that. This is what they suppose is the best translation, because some of them are translated, and Psalm 127:2 it says, “For He gives His beloved sleep.” Hey, you don't need melatonin or NyQuil because God gives His beloved sleep. He's got you. They think that the Hebrew is best translated, “For He gives to His beloved; sleep.” In vain, you're getting up early and you're staying late, thinking you're the one that's going to bring about success, eating the bread of anxious toil. God gives to His beloved, so sleep. Put in a faithful day of work and go to bed, because God is the giver of all good gifts, James 1:17. He gives to His beloved, rest. Work hard, rest. Don't fret, focus on the Lord. And you're like, “Who's going to worry about my needs?” God will. God will worry about your needs.

This past week, walk into Life Group guy's time and Jay Powers walks in, and he's like “Guys, my life changed this week!” And J.P. and I are like, “What happened? How did your life, how are we just not hearing about it?” He's like, “No joke, I'm sorry to interrupt, my life changed this week.” I'm like, “Tell us, man, how did it change?” This is how it changed. For two days out of Jay's week, he didn't go into work. Instead, he signed up with Carl Goley at Antioch to go into the prison ministry. He was sharing the Gospel and the hope of Jesus with men hardened for life, multiple life sentences, in solitary confinement, five by nine cell that they'll never get out of. And he was sharing Jesus with them. He's like, “This is it. This is it. Kingdom of God and His righteousness.” Like it was a refocusing, a re-centering, and Jay's sold out. It's not like he quit his job. He's still going to do his job for the glory of God. But it was this re-centering of this distillation and clarity of, this is all it is.

It's that we live one life under the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Because the rest is going to be sandcastles. It's all going to get taken by the tide of time, and only that which is done in, for, and unto Jesus will remain. It's the Gospel. It's the Gospel that those who have been given eternal life in Jesus Christ, that we would stop this straddling [straddles the two ladders], this imbalance of “Yeah, I trust you for my salvation, but I'm going to keep pursuing this.” It says, “You can't serve to masters, that instead that we would just keep pursuing the Kingdom of God [climbs all the way up the larger, taller ladder] and His righteousness. God I'm following after You, and you know what the reality is? [steps off larger ladder]

The reality is Freddie, our worship pastor, we were talking about this message, and he was like, “Hey you know what Jesus' words at the end? He says, ‘Seek first is kingdom and his righteousness,’ and then he says, ‘And all these things will be added onto you. [moves the larger ladder over the smaller ladder] This is the picture Jesus gives us. He's like “I'm actually not telling you to choose. Hey, I know you have needs.” He's just saying, “You pursue Me, and I got your needs. I haven't forgotten you. I'll meet all of them. Just pursue Me. I'll give you everything you need. Tomorrow will worry about itself.”

I started by saying, I pray this wouldn't just be a sermon, but that it would be a stake in the ground. This would be a pivotal time that we wouldn't just walk out of here and be like, "Okay, so this week, today, this Sunday," and that's not going to happen without prayer. So, I want to invite you all to bow your heads, get on your knees if you want, lift your hands to Heaven if you want, but that you would ask God to make this change in your heart. It's not going to happen by a volitional decision. It's not going to happen by my preaching. It will happen by the power and the Spirit of God who sanctifies and who can change, that we would pursue the Kingdom and His righteousness. Let's pray.

Father, we can't do this. The pull of this world and the mess of materialism and the status-seeking, it's got hooks in our heart. We pray by the power of the Holy Spirit, you would cut them today. That there would be a marked difference in Waco, McGregor, Robinson, Lorena, the ends of the earth, whoever's watching this internationally, that there would be a difference where we are, because You are making the difference in us. That we would pursue heavenly treasure instead of earthly trash. That you would be our God instead of greed. That in our days, as we're surrounded by other ladders, we would be Kingdom-seekers and not treasure-seekers. Lord, change our hearts. Change our minds. Let us live for You.

I want to give you a moment to just pray individually. You just pray and ask God to change you.

Lord, change us. Set us free from the entanglements of this world. That we would seek first, Your Kingdom, Your Righteousness. We love You. Amen.