

Seek First the Kingdom
Pastor Deborah Oakley – GFC – 1-1-23

Today is the first day of the new year. This is also the first day of the week which means it is the Lord's Day. On this day we put him first in our time by worshipping in His house. On this day we put Him first in our finances by giving our firstfruits – our tithes and offerings.

Everything we do should be an acknowledgement that God is first in our lives. Today I want to preach on what your first priority should be in this New year in a sermon entitled Seek First the Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God was a priority to Jesus and should be a priority to us. How do I know the kingdom was a priority to Jesus? His first recorded message is found in Matthew 4:17

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

Most of the parables of Christ begin with these words: *the kingdom of heaven is like...* Jesus told us His purpose in Luke 4:43

He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because I was sent for this purpose."

When Jesus sent His disciples out to minister – He told them in Matthew 10:7 –

As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus told His disciples in Luke 22:29

I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me.

After Jesus was resurrected – He appeared to His disciples. Acts 1:3 says

He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

Think about that. Jesus died and rose again, so He had His disciples' attention! Then He spent 40 days with them before He ascended into heaven. What he talked about in those 40 days was of utmost importance. And what He talked about was the kingdom of God! The priority of Jesus Christ was the kingdom of God. And if the kingdom of God is the priority of Christ – I believe the kingdom of God should be our priority too.

He taught us to pray in Matthew 6:9-10

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus taught us our purpose is the kingdom – our preaching is the kingdom – our praying is the kingdom – our priority is the kingdom. In fact, Jesus told us in Matthew 6:33 what our priority should be:

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you as well.

Our priority is to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Let's first look at what it means to seek.

1- SEEK

To seek means to search – pursue – explore. It also means to study – learn – understand. Biblical seeking is diligent and does not give up until it finds. Deuteronomy 4:29 says:

Seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

When I think of diligent seeking, I think of Psalm 63:1

O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.

We should seek God and His kingdom like a starving man looks for food. Like someone walking through a desert looks for water. It's a matter of life and death! Proverbs 2:4-5 tells us how to seek after God's wisdom.

If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.

If I told you that I buried one million dollars in cash in the field across the street – and the first one who finds it can have it – this room would empty out in about 10 seconds! Everyone would be out there seeking – digging with their hands or getting shovels or renting backhoes – but you would keep at it until somebody found that treasure that only lasts in this life. We should have that same attitude as we seek the Kingdom of God – which lasts for eternity.

However, too many have a lackadaisical attitude. They seek for God like there's one dollar buried in the field. They think "It's really not worth my time. I have more important things to do." It takes extraordinarily little to deter them from seeking.

However, nothing should deter us from our pursuit of the kingdom of God.

As Jesus said in Luke 11:9

Keep on asking and it will be given you; keep on seeking and you will find; keep on knocking and (the door) will be opened to you.

So, when we seek the kingdom of God – we will find it.

2- SEEK FIRST the Kingdom

Strong's Concordance says this means first in time, place, order, or importance. First means before anything else – most important – top priority.

The greatest tragedy in life is not death, but living it without purpose or priority. That's because failure to prioritize causes you to waste your life on the wrong things – or unimportant things.

The root of the word priority is the word prior. That which comes before everything else. That which is first. Who's first in your life? Who comes before and above all else? How do you ever really know?

The Bible gives us one way to know. It's what you give yourself to. You can tell your priorities by looking at your checkbook and your calendar. How you spend your money and your time. All through the Bible God said to give to Him first before anything else. This is called the Principle of Firstfruits. God wants to be first in your time and your finances. First in your attention. Many people say God is first, but they give Him no time, money, or attention. That says that God is not really first in their lives.

3- Seek first THE KINGDOM OF GOD

I want to talk about what the kingdom is not. The kingdom of God is not the same thing as the sovereignty of God. The sovereignty of God is His rulership over all things – whether they submit to His rule or not. The sovereignty of God is His ability to accomplish His purpose no matter what. But the Kingdom of God is where people willingly submit to the King.

Also, the kingdom of God is not a physical place. In John 18:36

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world."

Luke 17:20-21 says:

Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

So – if the kingdom of God is not a place or God's sovereignty - what is the kingdom of God?

The word kingdom comes from two words: king and domain or king and dominion. A king must have an area over which he rules and he must have the right to rule. So, a kingdom is the king's domain - it is the area over which a king rules.

To seek first the kingdom of God means: To have your whole heart submitted to God. To make Jesus the Lord of your life. Let Him reign without a rival.

You see, God must be God of all, or He is not God at all. He is not the God of some things, but all things. Everything in our lives is to be under His control. Jesus is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. But the question is this, "Is He your Lord?" It's one thing to say that "Jesus is my Lord" – it's another thing to live like Jesus is your Lord. In fact, Jesus Himself asked in Luke 6:46

Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?

You can't say Jesus is your Lord and then start making excuses for why you don't obey Him! You can't say Jesus is your Lord and then you live for Him on Sunday and for yourself the rest of the week. There are no "weekend citizens" in the kingdom of God.

Too many people are seeking first their own kingdoms! Their own will and doing things their own way! But you can't say Jesus is your Lord and then go your own way doing your own thing with no thought of the will of God for your life! When you are subject to a King – you live where he says live - you work where he says work – you go where he says go – and you do what he tells you to do.

A king has absolute power. Their commands are not suggestions. God gave us 10 Commandments not 10 Suggestions. None of us can pick and choose which commandments we obey! Jesus wants to rule our lives. Jesus wants to rule our families and our finances. Jesus wants to rule the way we work.

To seek the Kingdom of God means to seek to be in the will of God under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We must seek first the Kingdom of God AND

4- HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

Why does it say seek the kingdom AND His righteousness? Because righteousness is the way into the kingdom of God. Only the righteous can enter God's kingdom. Righteousness is the state of being right with God. Many people are foolishly trying to be good enough to get into the kingdom of heaven. The problem is that the bar is set too high. The standard is Jesus Christ and none of us can live up to that standard. Romans 3:23 says:

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

All our righteousness falls short of God's righteousness.

In fact, the absolute best we can do on the best day of our lives is filthy in the sight of God. Isaiah 64:5-6 says:

How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.

That's why we are not to seek OUR righteousness but HIS righteousness. We do not become right with God because of our works or trying to be good or do good. All of that is about OUR righteousness. But we are to seek the kingdom of God and HIS righteousness. That only comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

Before we are saved, we are totally unrighteousness. But after we are saved, we are made totally righteous. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says:

God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus not only died to forgive our sins – He died to make us righteous. This is the best deal in history – we give Jesus our sin and He gives us His righteousness! Where we used to be guilty, we are now not guilty. Where we used to be sinful, we are now righteous.

Righteousness is simply being right with God and that comes only through Christ. When we are born again we are made righteous. Before we are saved, we have no righteousness and we owe debts we can never repay. We are absolutely spiritually broke! But here's the good news this morning! Matthew 5:3 says:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Getting into the kingdom of heaven is not a matter of being good enough or rich enough – it's about being poor enough. It's about realizing our spiritual bank accounts are empty. It's about realizing that I'm a beggar with my empty hand outstretched. That's why Jesus said in Luke 5:31-32

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.

You don't need a doctor unless you are sick and you don't need Jesus unless you're a sinner. Of course, everyone's a sinner, but not everyone realizes it! That's why you must get people lost before you can get them saved! They must admit they're a sinner before they can be made righteous. Too many people think they can be good enough on their own. But listen to what the Apostle Paul prayed in Philippians 3:9

That I may be found in Him, not having any (self-achieved) righteousness that can be called my own, based on my obedience to the Law's demands, but possessing that (genuine righteousness) which comes through faith in Christ, the right standing with God, which comes from God by (saving) faith.

Now if the apostle Paul said he needed something more than self-achieved righteousness – surely, we need something more too!

The Bible says that we are made righteous by faith in Jesus Christ. That's why we must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Here's the great thing about seeking God's kingdom first. Jesus promised:

5- All things will be added to you!

This is the really, really good news! When we seek first the kingdom of God – God promises to provide all the other things we could be seeking after. In Matthew 6:25-34 Jesus said-

Therefore I say to you, do not worry 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? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you as well.

All what things will be added to you? All the things He just talked about: food, drink and clothing. The basic necessities of life. The things that we have need of.

And if you look around today you would probably conclude that most people are spending their lives – working every day – some working 2 or 3 jobs – just to secure the basic needs of food, water, clothes and housing. What a tragedy to think that most people are living in survival mode!

But Jesus said if we would seek first the kingdom – He would ensure that all these other things are taken care of! Now He didn't say seek the kingdom only! Some people think, "OK, I'll just sit around praying and hoping God will provide for me." It's not wrong to seek other things that we need – It's wrong to seek other things first before we seek God.

It's time to seek FIRST the Kingdom of God!

It doesn't matter how old you are or how young you are.

It doesn't matter how much or how little you've accomplished.

It doesn't matter how good you've been or how bad you've been.

The ground is level at the foot of the cross and we all need a Savior AND a Lord.

Now is the time to recognize that the master key to the Kingdom of God is the Master Himself – Jesus Christ! It’s not about us—it is all about Him. Seeking His Kingdom is the key to finding everything you long for. When we seek His kingdom, all other things will be added to us!

In other words, when you seek God first – He’s going to throw in everything else as part of the bargain. It’s like when you go grocery shopping – when you get to the checkout, they put everything you buy in plastic bags. You don’t pay extra for them – they are added unto you – given to you besides.

We don’t go shopping so we can get the plastic bags! We don’t seek first the bags! We seek first the groceries and the bags are added to us!

Many of us are living life with the wrong priorities! When we seek things first instead of the kingdom of God - it’s like we are seeking first the bags instead of the groceries. But God says, “You’ve got it backwards, when you seek the kingdom first – all things will be added to you.”

- When you seek the kingdom first – food will be added to you.
- When you seek the kingdom first – clothes will be added to you.
- When you seek the kingdom first – purpose in life will be added to you.

Romans 14:17 says:

The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

When you seek the kingdom first – peace and joy will be added to you.

1 Corinthians 4:20 says:

For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.

When you seek the kingdom first – power will be added to you.

Everything you God knows you need will be added to you when you seek first the kingdom of God!

God is calling every one of us to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

God is calling us to put Him first.

And when we seek His kingdom and His righteousness first – God promised that He’ll take care of the rest. Hallelujah!

So, I encourage you on the first day of a new year – begin the year right by seeking first the Kingdom of God!