
Kingdom Priorities

Message by Pastor Tom, Interim Lead Pastor

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Scripture Passage Matthew 6:33-34

Vancouver Chinese Baptist Church Vancouver, Canada



One of the huge questions is what shapes our lives and makes us who we are, is it nature? Our genetic code written within us or is it nurture? Which includes upbringing and social environment. Certainly genes and culture have powerful influences on our lives. No question about that, but perhaps there is another part of that equation which we need to consider beyond nature and nurture.

Some people in the whole area of behavior and moral ethics suggest that there is a third part to the equation. It is **CHOICE**. The essence of being human is being able to choose. We are not robots. We are not computers programmed with data to produce results. We are not animals. We are made **IMAGO DEI**, in the image of God and this gives us the freedom and the responsibility of choice.

Jesus calls us to make a core choice. It is to choose the kingdom of God which we have defined that as the reign and rule of God over our lives. Jesus presents this as the best choice we can make when he says, Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be given to you. Jesus is calling us to put the kingdom first in our lives and with it, to put first things first. The kingdom is to be the priority in our lives. When we make a choice, a kingdom choice, we are putting God's agenda first in our lives. We are called to think in terms of kingdom choices, making the kingdom a priority.

A kingdom choice or a kingdom priority means choosing a relationship or an attitude or an action which is aligned with the character and with the will and also the purpose of God, and putting that choice first and then trusting God with the outcome. This choice becomes the kingdom priority.

Seeking the kingdom, making kingdom choices may not always be easy, but it might be a little easier if we could see what it would do in our lives.

KINGDOM CHOICES ARE BASED ON PRINCIPLES, NOT ON PRAGMATICS.

If I hear that there is an accident on the Burrard Bridge, I take the Granville Street bridge, that's being pragmatic. In so many ways, we are pragmatists.

But when you add an -ISM to the end of the word, we have **pragmatism**. It means that consciously or unconsciously you have a life philosophy or a worldview that says, the end justifies the means, you do whatever you have to do.

Pragmatism usually looks for the short term solution. Just to get things done. Whatever works. Pragmatism says, get through this problem, find a solution, don't worry about what lies ahead.

One of the real tensions between Christianity and pragmatism is the conflict between what is right and what is simply expedient. Just get things done, don't worry about where things will lead to, just get the job done.

Caiaphas, who interviewed Jesus at his trial, he advised the Jews that it was expedient for someone to die on behalf of the people, that was a pragmatic solution.

In the moral realm, people who make decisions that are blown by the winds of pragmatism are little more than moral chameleons. They change color with every different issue. They live on the changing results of the Gallup Poll of community values.

But when we adopt a moral and spiritual stance that says, there is a kingdom issue at stake, there are principles that do not change. I believe we become people who receive an enormous inner power and strength from God to be able to defend what we have chosen, to live out of what we believe is right. We are not swayed by what is pragmatic or by the popular opinion or by what will give a short result. We make a kingdom choice and we trust God for the results.

One of our great sources of worry is what will other people think about us. When we make kingdom choices, that is not the issue. The real issue is, what does God think about it.

Does that mean the life will be easy? Not at all.

Let me take you into one of the great stories in the Old Testament, story of Joseph, hated by his brothers, sold into slavery, ends up in the house of a man called Potiphar. One day, everyone is out. Potiphar's wife makes him an invitation, come to bed with me. Joseph says NO, here is in answer in Genesis 39:8-10.

8 But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care.

9 No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

10 And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

This decision lands Joseph in prison for 13 years! If that's a kingdom decision, I have to say, that doesn't sound too bright. Joseph could have taken the pragmatic route instead of standing on principle. But in prison Joseph gained a reputation for honesty and courage as well as being able to understand the signs of the times, that's what got him released and given a position of power in Egypt which was crucial when his brothers came looking for food. He was able to save the family and in fact this paves the way into the rest of God's story in the Old Testament.

Let's go back a minute and imagine Joseph says YES to this powerful woman's invitation for casual sex. He spends the afternoon in bed with her. No one knows. What's the fuss. Then a week or so later, she sees him talking to some of the other slaves. They turn and look at her, laughing among themselves and she think to herself, he is talking to them about me and what I was like in bed. So she calls her head personal guard, quietly gives him an instruction and Joseph is never seen again.

Choices that are based on pragmatism seek a short term solution. They look for the quick-fix, that's what drugs and alcohol do. They simply get us through the urgent crisis, through the immediate predicament. They satisfy our pressing craving for instant gratification. Choices that are based on the Gallup poll or on popular opinion are like truth written on Kleenex. It is merely disposable truth. You throw it away as soon as you have wiped your nose.

Kingdom choices are different. They are based on principles. They align themselves with kingdom truth and with the character of God. They are not driven by the winds of change. They have deep roots in truth.

It is Immanuel Kant who reminds us that the means used to accomplish ends are just as important as the ends. It was Machiavelli who taught the opposite, the end justifies the means.

When we have the spiritual fortitude and the moral courage in our day to make kingdom choices and to see the kingdom as a priority, and it may be tough to get to that point, but when we get there I believe that we will experience a quiet and deep strength, a power that we will never have known before. It is because we have made a kingdom decision, decision in which God is a stakeholder.

When the big decisions in our lives are kingdom decisions, the other smaller decisions that revolve around this kingdom truth actually become easier.

Let me tread gently into an illustration and I realize it may be sensitive for some. I do not mean to embarrass anyone.

I am well aware of the sexual standards in our culture and also the pressure in our society in the area of sexuality. More and more young people and those not so young simply live together. The whole area of sexuality before and outside of marriage may be one of the last moral standards we can seek to hold as Christians. I don't expect non-Christians to live like Christians but I think God expects Christians to live like Christians.

I am well aware of the pressure from friends, from culture for people to sleep together, to live together. After all, we are told, everyone's doing it.

If you are in a relationship, let me ask you to have the courage and the moral stamina not to sleep together, to live together before you enter into marriage. What other people choose to do is not the issue, how other

people live is not the issue. You are a daughter or son of the king, you have the courage to make a kingdom choice.

WHEN WE MAKE A KINGDOM CHOICE, WE ALLOW GOD TO GIVE US MORE THAN WE ASK.

I think many of us struggle with what we ask God for in prayer and how God chooses to answer us. We read that whatever we ask God will answer and we are not sure if that really works.

I wonder if we need to ask a better question. Is what we are asking for kingdom choice, in other words does it align itself with the heart of God? This is praying: may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Perhaps when it does, God is willing and able not only to answer our prayer, but in fact to give us more than we ask for.

2 Chronicles 1.

Solomon is now king over Israel. With this great power comes awesome responsibility.

7 That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

8 Solomon answered God, "You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place."

9 Now, LORD God, let your promise to my father David be confirmed, for you have made me king over a people who are as numerous as the dust of the earth.

10 Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

11 God said to Solomon, "Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for

wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king,

12 therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have."

That became true in Solomon's life. He did receive wisdom and knowledge, but he also received all the other things also: wealth, riches and honor.

If we struggle with our prayers and I think with honesty most of us do, perhaps we need to look at what we are praying for. Ask with frankness, what is the motive for this prayer, will it enable to me to serve people better or is it merely for my own benefit. We need to ask kingdom questions about what its intention really is.

WHEN WE MAKE A KINGDOM CHOICE, WE ALLOW GOD TO MEET OUR NEEDS THROUGH HIS FAITHFULNESS.

Most of us, if not all of us, struggle with worry and perhaps high on our worry list is money. How will we make ends meet in the economic climate of our day.

I was having lunch with someone some time ago and we talked about the economy. He said, remember the program that one company promotes, FREEDOM 55, invest with us and you can retire at 55. He said they now have a new program. It is called FREEDOM 88.

One of the problems for many people today is the credit card debt they carry. It is like a financial anchor dragging them down.

How do we make ends meet when the middle seems to keep moving?

This is not a new problem. We find this same struggle in a book called Haggai. Almost no one ever reads Haggai. Even hard to find. Start at Malachi, end of the Old Testament, go back 2 books and you are there. It is part of what we call the Minor Prophets.

We need to know the context for this little book, the stage setting.

586, nation taken into exile for 70 years.

Around 516 people are allowed to return. The initial group comes back with great enthusiasm, start work on re-building the Temple.

Then as human nature often is, they begin to lose that initial enthusiasm and start to focus on their own needs.

Haggai is sent to speak into this situation.

2 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'"

3 Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai:

4 "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"

6 You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."

No matter how much you have, it is never enough.

7 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways."

8 Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the LORD.

9 "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house.

10 Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops.

11 I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands."

Putting God first is intimately related to trust. In the Old Testament, the offering was called the first fruits. The idea was not that you took in all the harvest, saw what you had, took what you needed to live on and then gave God whatever was left over. No, the truth was that you took the very first of the harvest as it began to come. You gave that to God as an act of faith and trust that the rest would follow.

4 levels of support we are responsible to engage in.

1. The Lord's work

If you are a Christian, part of VCBC, you are responsible to support what God wants to do here through the gifts of his people. That is not an option for you. That is a kingdom priority. This is not an appeal for money, but an appeal that we become people who trust God. If you receive from the ministry, you support the ministry.

I read about a church in California, struggling financially, calculated that if their entire congregation was on welfare, but tithed, gave God the first 10%, their church income would double.

The Bible calls us to be people who trust God and who give generously and joyfully. This is rooted in the generosity of God.

2 Cor 9:6-8

6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2. We are responsible to support our own families.

1 Tim 5:8

8 If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

3. We are responsible to help and assist others in the church.

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

4. We are responsible to help those who are needy, hungry, thirsty. Matthew 25.

But with honesty, we still worry. We worry about all kinds of things: health, our family, money, that's why we need to read and live

what Jesus says in Matthew 6. Note the number of times Jesus says, do not worry...

Verse 25

Verse 27

Verse 28

Verse 31

Verse 34.

Lets call worry for what it really s.

Worry is **A LIAR**. We read in the Bible and we sing about trusting in God. He provides, he cares and even as we sing that, worry sneaks into our minds and says, don't believe it. Worry sows the seeds of mistrust and doubt. All worry does is what Satan did in the garden, which was to plant an idea.

Worry is **A THIEF**. Worry plunders our heart and soul. It robs us of peace.

We worry about the **PAST**, what we said and did or perhaps did not do. Worry takes us back to living in the quagmire of what we cannot change.

We worry about the **FUTURE**. Worry catapults us into what has not yet taken place and we see all that might happen, we begin to imagine a thousand **WHAT IFS**, what if this happens, what if that happens and we become paralyzed by the fear of what may never be. Worry has done its deadly work. By the way, the way to take charge of the unknown future is to make promises and keep them, that's another sermon. We control the future by making promises.

So Jesus says, do not worry, which is not the same as saying, whatever or who cares.

His remedy, his solution for worry is seek the kingdom, make a kingdom choice, put the kingdom first and then allow God to give you

the gift of peace so that you can get on with your day. If making a kingdom choice gives us enormous power from which we stand, then making a kingdom choice also gives us enormous peace. We have chosen to live in a way that is aligned with the kingdom of God and we are trusting God to meet us in his faithfulness. The gift we receive for that decision is the gift of God's peace.

Philippians 4

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

So when this robber and rapist called worry comes, it finds the door to our heart and mind barred and defended by that armed warrior of God called peace.

I think many of you could stand and give witness to that truth about how to live. You put the kingdom first when it was not easy to do so. You made a kingdom choice in your lives even in tough times and you could stand back and watch his faithfulness rise in your life like the rising of the dawn.

When we seek the kingdom and when we will trust putting the kingdom first, we are really saying, God we trust you. We will not listen to the voices of doubt, to the lies of distrust and we trust your faithfulness to rise again.