

## *Building the Kingdom — Matthew 6:33*

An associate of Stephen Covey, the best-selling business author, tells about going to a time management seminar. The seminar leader said, “Alright, it’s time for a quiz”, and he brought out from underneath the table a clear glass gallon sized jar. He then put on the table next to the jar a platter with fist sized rocks and asked each seminar participant to estimate the number of rocks that could be fit into the jar. Everyone came up with a number. Then he carefully began placing the rocks into the jar, one at a time, until they reached the top of the jar. Then he asked, “Is it full?”, and everyone agreed it was full. You couldn’t get another rock into that jar.

“Wait a minute,” he said, and he reached down under the table and pulled out a bag full of gravel. He poured the gravel in over the rocks and it all filtered down and filled in the spaces.

Next he asked, “Now it is full?”

Having been tricked once they knew that it wasn’t full, so he reached down again and pulled out a bag full of sand. He poured the sand into the jar and it filtered down into all the small spaces. After that he said, “Now is it full?”

Everyone agreed, no, it’s still not full. So for the last time he reached down, took out a pitcher of water and poured almost an entire quart of water in as it ran down and filled the jar all the way to the brim.

After he had done this he asked the question: “What is the point of all of this?” Someone said, “Well, there are gaps, and if you really work at it, you can always fit more into your life.”

“No,” he said, “that is not the point. The point is this: if you hadn’t put these big rocks in first, would you ever have gotten any of them in?”

Jesus said it like this in Matthew 6:33: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well.” In other words, if Christians put God and his kingdom first in our lives, there will be room for everything else we need. But, if we first fill our lives with busyness and other things there will be no room for what is most important. God and his kingdom will get the left over spaces and cracks. My challenge to you is to make God and his kingdom first in your life in everything from loyalty to time to money. To be a kingdom Christian first requires allegiance

to the king.

Years ago a Frenchman moved to England and changed his citizenship to become a British subject. Immediately after the legal ceremony finalizing that transition someone asked him, “What’s the differenced?” He gave a clever answer that a historian would especially appreciate when he said, “Yesterday the Battle of Waterloo was a defeat; today it is a victory.”

Which king gets our allegiance determines how we interpret all of life. Christians are those who have renounced all other allegiances and sworn loyalty to Jesus Christ as our King. Our primary citizenship is in the kingdom of God and not in the United States of America or any other country of the world. Our first loyalty as a Christian is to Jesus Christ and to no one else.

Recently someone asked me if Wooddale Church requires loyalty of those who become its members. I said, “Indeed we do. We require loyalty to Jesus Christ!” If there is no loyalty to Jesus Christ there is little point in suggesting that anyone become a kingdom Christian. There is zero chance that life will be filled first with God or his kingdom. Things like prayer and giving and sharing our Christian faith or sending missionaries will never be important.

A second requirement to becoming a kingdom Christian is fighting evil enemies. When talking the oath of office, government officials are asked to promise that they will “support the constitution of the United States and defend it against all enemies domestic and foreign.” That’s based upon the assumption that the Constitution of the United States is something good and that wherever there is something good there is the threat of evil up against it.

We live in a world where good always has evil enemies. That’s why Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 that we are to “seek (God’s) kingdom and his righteousness.” The Bible teaches that we are caught up in a spiritual warfare that is fought every day everywhere. It is a life-and-death conflict between God and Satan, between righteousness and evil. Everything we say and do individually as Christians and as a church together has something to do with fighting evil and promoting good. Spiritual warfare for the righteous-

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ness of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ is far greater and more important than any war this country could ever be engaged in.

Imagine if America were in World War III. Imagine if your sons and daughters and brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers were fighting around the world to preserve the United States of America. We would pray so that we would win.

The greatest weapon in any spiritual battle is prayer. The prayers of Christians are urgently needed. We must fight the enemies of evil, both domestic and foreign, and we must pray in order to win.

Which leads to a third requirement of kingdom Christianity and that is building the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not limited to any country, language, denomination or church. It is international, including people of every nation, tongue and tribe. It stretches across denominations and churches to incorporate Christians of every tradition. Therefore, we are not in competition with any other congregation in our town or area. We delight when other churches teach the Bible and grow spiritually and numerically.

One church should not recruit any Christian from any other church. Our goal is not to redistribute the kingdom but to build the kingdom through reaching those who are unchurched and non-Christians.

A fourth and final requirement of kingdom Christians is to share our blessings. Ralph Winter is a historian of missions and a theologian. He has an interesting analysis of the Old Testament and says that the Old Testament nation of Israel “wanted to be blessed but didn’t want to be a blessing. As a result they eventually lost the blessing of God.” In other words, they wanted God’s love, they wanted God’s attention, they wanted God’s money, they wanted everything else God would give to them but they would not share it, so God quit blessing them.

The intent of God’s blessing, which he loves to give, is that as we receive blessings from God we give it away and give it away and give it away and that makes space for God to bless us more. But if we keep it for ourselves we make no space and God’s blessings stop.

It’s a “use it or lose it” principle. God has given to us salvation, church, money, jobs, health, freedom, peace and a long list of a thousand other gifts. While God is glad to give us what we have, he wants us to share those blessings with others. If we don’t, we risk losing all God has blessed us with. We have been blessed with salvation, so let’s give it away.

A Wisconsin woman invited her unchurched

neighbor from the next farm to church. The neighbor lady said, “I’d be glad to come and I’ll wear my brand new apron.” The church lady knew that no one else wore aprons to church so she phoned every other woman in the congregation and asked them to wear aprons the next Sunday so that her neighbor wouldn’t be embarrassed. Months later the neighbor found out what those women had done and she decided that if they could care that much about her, she wanted to become a Christian, too. For the women in that church, sharing their faith was more important than the clothes they wore.

More recently a man on the West Coast invited a friend to a gathering of Christian men. After the meeting was over his friend said he could never go again because he was the only one there with his ear pierced. The Christian man immediately went out and had his ear pierced in order to reach his friend for Jesus Christ. He did what he had to do to win his friend to Christ.

It all comes down to the question of whether or not each of us considers ourselves to be kingdom Christians. What would you say? Is your allegiance to Jesus Christ the King? Are you fighting against his evil enemies? Are you building the kingdom? Are you sharing your blessings? Remember that life is like that glass jar. If it is filled first with self and job and problems and money and possessions and ambitions there may be only a crack left to squeeze God in, but if we are kingdom Christians we will fill our lives with God, with his kingdom and his righteousness and then all of the other things will be ours as well.

Oh God, look deep into our hearts and see there a 100% allegiance to Jesus Christ your Son as our King. Listen as we go on record that we will be your soldiers to fight for your cause and to build your kingdom. And as you have blessed us we will give that blessing away to others. Count us, Lord, as kingdom Christians for Jesus Christ. Amen.

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