# The Main Thing : Strive for Him First and He Will Provide!

Sermon Preached by Rev. Chuck Cole 01/05/19 at St. John’s UMC Staunton

# Matthew 6:19-34 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

### Concerning Treasures

19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6%3A19-34&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-23302a)] consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6%3A19-34&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-23303b)] consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

### The Sound Eye

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 unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

### Serving Two Masters

24 “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6%3A19-34&version=NRSV" \l "fen-NRSV-23307c)]

### Do Not Worry

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6%3A19-34&version=NRSV" \l "fen-NRSV-23308d)] or about your body, what you will wear. 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 can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6%3A19-34&version=NRSV" \l "fen-NRSV-23310e)] 28 And why do you worry 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 clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But strive first for the kingdom of God[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6%3A19-34&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-23316f)] and his[[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6%3A19-34&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-23316g)] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

34 “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

Today is Epiphany Sunday it is the day that we traditionally celebrate the revelation of the light of the World to everyone, not just Jews but Gentiles as well. We celebrate this day among other things the provision of the light of the world to us who lived in Darkness.

As we begin a new year we are going to spend January considering how we can center our hearts and lives on the light. How we can in our striving each day be striving for Him and not lesser things.

In our passage this morning The light of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ, after a poetic and powerful discussion about how God feeds the birds, clothes the flowers and cares for the grass says -

30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

He calls us to focus our vision to direct our striving in this life first to the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, away from the darkness and toward the light of the World; we also have here a beautiful promise that as we seek him first our needs will be met.

Earlier in our passage we have the warning that you cannot serve two masters - God and Mammon - the stuff of this world in all its forms - you can only serve one.

In the same way our focus cannot be divided in our striving either our needs or wants are the focus of our striving or searching or The Light of the World - his Kingdom and Righteousness are.

If the fulfillment of our needs and wants such as food, clothing, money, power, experience is the focus of our living and our striving Jesus says that him and his Kingdom and his righteousness will be pushed out of the way. That is indeed a great loss.

But if the focus of our living and striving is Him and His Kingdom then he will provide those other things we seek that are good for us along with his Kingdom and his Righteousness this is a far greater gain than if we were successful in meeting all our other needs - which all evidence suggests is not likely if they are the center of our living.

To seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness we might choose paths of employment that result in less income or seeming security, we might as we strive to put him in the center find ourselves called to make choices that others might disapprove of and we might suffer consequences, we might be called to give sacrificially in a way that is contrary it would seem to our or the well-being of loved ones.

Disciples throughout the ages have faced these kinds of challenges.

In those circumstances we have this promise-

indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But strive first for the kingdom of God[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6%3A19-34&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-23316f)] and his[[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6%3A19-34&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-23316g)] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

We can in all circumstances trust his intent even if there are times when we do not fully understand his actions. We can trust as we seek him, his kingdom and his righteousness with our lives he will provide our needs as he understands them not always as we do. Those in the Bible who were faithful, yet they suffered lack for a time: Elijah, Job, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Paul but God ultimately works together all things for their and our good.

When Elijah was fleeing for his life and was exhausted and hungry - God sent ravens to feed him and told him to take a nap.

He will send Ravens and rest as well for you.

28 We know that all things work together for good[[u](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+8&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28130u)] for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family …. If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?

As we seek him first he will provide and we will be drawn closer to him. He will provide the far greater good than we can provide for ourselves by our own effort. He will provide for us as a loving Father provides for his children, not always all they would want but as they need to the best of his ability. Unlike a human Father who can falter or err the Father of lights never does so.

Let us embrace the hope in our promise this morning and strive to seek after Him, his Kingdom and his righteousness first prioritizing it over the meeting of other needs.

This coming year when we have discretion such as whether to attend church or read the scripture or pray or work on another project let us attend church, read the scripture or pray trusting that seeking him will be more fruitful and he will provide our needs.

If we feel a desire to give to a cause of the Kingdom but are tempted to hold back out of fear we might not be able to meet another need let us be generous and trust.

If faithfulness calls us to say something or do something that risks loss or uncertainty be courageous let us trust our Lord’s promise and take that step.

When we feel that we have made a decision that is faithful but we doubt his provision for us or those that we love let us embrace wholeheartedly this promise.

This coming year let us establish in our lives new or renewed spiritual efforts to focus our efforts on growing in his kingdom and his righteousness and not on meeting our other needs and fulfilling other wants.

One practice that our Methodist forebears recommend for this is Fasting, total abstinence from food every Wednesday and Friday till dinner a friend and I have just started this discipline with the turn of the new year. I have not been doing it long enough to report to you fruit but I can tell you this Friday when I experienced hunger I reminded myself of this promise, I remembered that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, that Christ is the bread of life which is a gift that I can only receive that feeds a far deeper need than filling my belly. He is the light that I need.

I have also recently begun the Bishops 2020 reading plan. This year the Bishop has selected a thematic reading plan the first twenty-one day segment is on Seeking His Presence. This year’s plan is more devotional in nature, the readings are shorter, and I have found it over these last five days to be a blessing. This may be one way to help us each Seek Him and his Kingdom and His righteousness first.

For us here at St. John’s let us seek him and his kingdom and his righteousness first trusting him to provide what is needed for his Kingdom to move forward in this place, whatever that might look like, as we seek to advance his kingdom and draw closer to him.

Let us truly as individuals and as a faith community embrace this promise and strive to keep him at the center. He will provide for our needs as we seek first his Kingdom sometimes that provision will seem different than we imagine but he knows what provision we need. Let us seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. Let us in times seek first the Light of the World who comes to us as a gift of provision and who comes to us as we seek him. Amen.