

## Seek First the Kingdom Matthew 6:25-33

I want to read to you from Matthew chapter six, which gives us our text today. But I want to do it this way to read 6:33 the last verse, which is our theme.

And then I'll read all the rest, and I'll read 6:33 again, because the theme, as Pastor Parks already said for this year is "seeking first the Kingdom," which comes from Matthew 6:33. Jesus words there. And we're going to look at the question, what do people seek in general? And what does it mean to seek the kingdom? And what does it mean to seek it first?

And we'll look as Jesus does at the alternatives, some of them at least, to seeking first the kingdom, which are described in verses 1 to 20 5 or 30. In Matthew chapter six. And then we'll look at some particulars, including seeking the Lord first at work, and then in all of life, even our eating and drinking and sleeping.

So let's, let's hear God's word. 6:33 and then back to the top. Jesus said,

...but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you then leading to it. Therefore, Jesus said, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink, or 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 so nor reap nor gather into barns. And yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour or unit literally to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin. And I tell you, not even Solomon and all his glory was arrayed like one of these. But if God so close the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow, is 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? Or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek after or run after these things, and your heavenly father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Lord, give us ears to hear all that you're saying to us today.

We pray in Jesus name, Amen. And you may be seated.

So about a month ago, I read a very surprising article on the rising use of psychedelic drugs in corporate suites in America. Magic mushrooms. Psilocybin, if you will. Hallucinogens. Why? You know, as the article pointed out, for many years, these drugs were part of the alternative culture. Tune in, drop out. And now they're in corporate suites. What's going on?

What's the rationale for that? And the answer is the theory, which I do not endorse nor promote. The theory is that by taking these psychedelic drugs, you can become more calm, more empathetic, more emotionally attuned to people, more creative, less harsh. You can reduce your stress, you can become less exhausted, you can be more creative. And that, of course, is what the corporate folk are looking for.

With this new approach, it's probably more like a fad than a trend. They're thinking if people can relax and get a big view of the world, they'll become more creative. We got to get rid of the sterile gray cubicle we have to stop having too many charts and demands and meeting quotas. We have to be empathetic, creativity, creative.

And the thought is, maybe this will be a way that we can improve our creativity, thereby improving our products, thereby helping, of course, the bottom line now this actually aligns with something else is going on in our culture today. And that is, you may have heard this phrase comes from a talk. Given a Ted talk even a few years ago became a book.

Bring your whole self to work. That is to say, stop having a wife over here. That's your business life and a life over here. That's your home life. Stop being kind and gentle and empathetic and loving your spouse and loving your children. And over here, it's slash and burn and fire people and cut the staff and boost the bottom line by cutting personnel costs.

So this is, say, throwing people out on their ear instead of having this sharp disjunction between your work self and your private self. Bring your whole self to work. Be kind. Be empathetic. Now we can certainly agree with that goal, and the way the Bible expresses it is seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to that is to say, seek the kingdom of God.

Whatever you do, wherever you go at home. Yes, among your friends, a church? Yes, at work? Yes. Whatever you do, Paul says, do it all to the glory of God, commenting as he does on what Jesus says. People want a unified life. The cry of the heart for so many people is not to have a divided life. People want a seamless life.

As one person put it, whatever we do, do it all for the glory of God. Seek first the kingdom. Oh, and by the way, when you seek the kingdom, you seek the king. And when you seek the king and turn to the king, he says, I will take care of you even as I rule in your life. I will also take care of your life.

I'll add the things that we want out of life now. The beauty about this particular choice that we made, to be honest, it was my idea that we would have. This verse is that the two long serving, beloved, gifted, godly pastors of this church, Pastors Barker and Reeder, both chose this verse as their life first. And so we're reaffirming a value that we've had in this church for all these years. I didn't know it. I was told afterward I said, this is wonderful, and it actually fits our nature as a church. Now, if you're a visitor today, we're glad to have you. If you're one of those folks who took a New Year's resolution to start coming to church more, but very glad to have you. And you can come again any time. But if you're thinking about this church, you need to know that we're a kingdom minded church. So this is say we don't just focus on the church itself. We care about the church, but we're looking more broadly. This is a missional church. And so we have missional projects right here in Birmingham to do good and love people here and also nationally and also internationally. We're a missional church, an enormous amount of our energy and our resources go to missions here and throughout the world, but we're also interested in ordinary, everyday things. And one sign of that is that we have a ballet ministry and a camping ministry and a soccer ministry, because we believe that we want children to love God with their minds and their bodies, and give their little bodies and their growing bodies and their mature bodies to the Lord, because we seek first the Kingdom, not just being saved from our sins, we give our whole selves to the Lord.

And we have schools. We have a school that runs from pre-K all the way to senior high. And in that school we try to bring every discipline into the world. We don't just add numbers, we believe that God created a world in which numbers work and explain things. It's not people who are atheist wonder, how is it that the numbers work in all these marvelous ways?

And the laws of physics are so consistent? Well, it's because somebody made it that way. And so we take physics and we take math and we take biology and history. We and we look at all of it in our school, Briarwood Christian School, in light of the work of the King, the Lord of the universe, we have a seminary.

The seminary trains pastors and other church workers to go out throughout Birmingham and in our part of Alabama, and to go throughout the world serving the King and yes, building churches, but training people to follow the Lord. So we also have business leader training for both men and women, because we want people to practice their faith out in the business world, not just giving their money away once they earn it, but serving the Lord in everything they do in the business place.

This is a kingdom oriented institution or church. Now, when we say we seek first the kingdom, we're saying that other people seek other things first in business. Not that I'm against profitability, but in business. The thing businesses seek first is long term, sustainable profitability. And students generally, if you ask them outside the church building, what do you seek?

Students and maybe high school students would say, well, I what I want to do is to get into a great college and have a fantastic scholarship as well. That's what I seek first. Parents want happy children. That's what they seek first. And children want indulgent parents. And people who are thinking about retiring want seek first, rolling around the Alps and getting it just right so I can quit when I'm still strong.

But I have enough money and I can take a hiking vacation all over Europe when I finally retire. These are some things that people seek. And Jesus says the unified life comes by seeking first the kingdom. Now when you say seek first the kingdom, people have ideas that pop into their minds. In Jesus day when he said, seek first the kingdom.

There are various pieces of art, pieces of evidence throughout the New Testament, places like acts chapter one in Matthew, chapter Luke, chapter 19 that indicate that people thought that he meant he's going to bring a physical reign, a restoration of the era of David. glory back to Israel. Rome kicked out. They saw it very materially. And if you ask an ordinary person today, when I use the word kingdom, what do you think of?

They're apt to think an ordinary person is apt to think of crenelated towers and knights on steeds and women with long hair, with those pointy hats that the hair comes out the back and and drawbridges and so forth. That's what we have in our mind. But that's not what Jesus means. The kingdom is not bounded geographically. To enter the kingdom is not to cross over a border with your passport in hand.

It is not to cross over a river or a bridge. It is to enter into a life under the leadership of Jesus the King. To seek the kingdom is to seek the King's governance or guidance or rule over all of life. Let me say it a different way. When you look at parables, let's say the kingdom of heaven is like or the kingdom of God is like.

It's either describing how God rules or how we live under God's rule. When Jesus says, the kingdom of like of God is like a mustard seed, he means it starts out small and then it grows. That's how the king rules. He builds things slowly. Now in Matthew chapter six, Jesus also lists the alternatives to seeking first the kingdom.

You can open your Bible if you have one, or just read it later on yourself. In Matthew chapter six, verses 1 to 18, Jesus labels the alternative of seeking first your own honor and glory. Jesus says, when you perform acts of service, don't let anybody know what you're doing. Keep it to yourself. When you give alms to the poor, don't let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. When you pray. Don't pray in a street corner where people see you praying in private. Don't build your reputation. Don't seek personal honor because honor, of course, can take care of you, right? If people think well of you enough, then if trouble comes your way, you can always rely on your friends who think you're wonderful and they'll help you.

And so that's an alternative way of ruling. I want to be thought of well, and that'll give me a good life. Chapter six, verse 19 to 24 Jesus says, you can't serve both God and money. And that's another alternate deity. If I have enough money, strong enough career, right, skill set, earn money, then I'll be taking care of.

If things go the wrong direction. I've got my money. I can fall back on that. That's an alternative to seeking first the king. Even among people who are disciples. Jesus says there is another possibility. And that is you're going to be frantic with worry and concern and try to work everything out and just do and do and do so.

Nothing goes wrong. That is, I by my labors will make all difficulties impossible. That's what's described in verses 25 and following Jesus says in verse 25, we now have these verses up on on the screen, or at least we will in a second. Jesus's in verse 25, don't be anxious. That means don't worry, don't worry. We know that worry is wrong.

Anxiety is wrong. We live in the age of anxiety. But people say, well, I'm not worried. I'm just thinking about it. I'm just planning things. Of course we should plan. Of course we should be mindful of things that can go wrong. Laziness is no virtue in the kingdom of God or thoughtlessness is no virtue. The idea is don't be obsessed with planning to make sure that nothing can go wrong.

There is a proper place for concern. Paul said, Corinthians 11 describes all the terrible things that have happened to him. He's been beaten, he's been jailed, he's been shipwrecked. And then he adds this little comment. Besides that, I have the concern or the worry or anxiety. One word can mean all three, possibly depending on context. I have a concern about all my churches.

He means. I mean, shipwreck is bad, no question of being tossed in jail and beaten. Definitely, definitely bad. But I kind of hate the burden of having all of these churches everywhere that I started. And now I'm not there. And it weighs on me every day. It is not wrong to feel responsible for things. Paul's not confessing a sin here, but he says, I have the burden or the or the concern about my church should not.

There's a proper concern if you are going to sing a solo and you're not sure your voice is quite up to it, or your friend, your child, your other family members, you sing a solo, you're not sure, or maybe you have 300 lines in a play and they can't memorize anything. There's a place for being a little concerned.

And by the way, if you're singing the solo or you've got 300 lines, there's a place for concern. It galvanizes us for action. But it can tip over into godless anxiety. And the thought that if I do everything perfectly, all will be well. He's warning about obsession over physical needs and desires, and he answers it this way. He says, look, in verses 25, 26 and 27, you shouldn't worry about what you eat, and you drink the bodies more than clothing.

And take a look at the birds. I mean, take a look at flowers, wild flowers that grow. I mean, birds work, you know, they get up, they don't have an alarm clock, but they get up, they go to work, they eat seeds, bugs, depending on their diet. But it's not like they have a schedule. It's not like they gather extra seeds and they put it in barns and say, oh, if I got a bad day.

No, they're you're kind of chaotic. And by the way, if you think birds are chaotic, take a look at flowers. They don't work at all. We could draw a comparison. People work and worry and plan and store and birds work and they don't worry. And flowers don't work at all. But God takes care of all three if God can take care of flowers.

In fact. In fact, Jesus says, the richest man in the ancient Near East at the time, Solomon in all of his glory and all of his wealth and all of his fantastic clothing, could not equal the clothing of a beautiful wild flower. So why are you worried about your clothes? God cares for the birds. He cares for the flowers even though they don't live forever.

Even as we don't. He sticks a little joke in here. Eventually, in verse 27, the ESV translate who by worrying can add a single hour to a span of life. Now this hides something that's in the Greek, and what it hides is the word hour and span. So hour. An hour is a hallelujah and a span is a goose.

And what it actually says in the original is who can? Who can add a span to his length. Now, span can be a span of time, but the ordinary meaning of the word span is this. It's about 18in. And who can add a span to his length to mean length of life. It also can mean height. And so you get the joke.

Anybody here five foot two. Wish your a little taller. Can you add 18in and go from five, two to 6 to 8 by worrying about it? It's absurd. You're allowed to laugh at this. These are Jesus jokes. We don't get Jesus jokes, but this is a joke. Can anybody can anybody get 18in taller by worrying about how tall they are?

The answer is no. They cannot. Can anybody add the other kind of a span to their length, the length of days? Can anybody add a span? And he spent an hour a day. Can you add time to your life by worrying about it? Actually, people would say, maybe your life gets shorter when you worry right? I don't drink too much and don't have bad habits.

Sleep enough. That's not worry. That's proper concern. And so he's saying this don't worry, verse 31 about what you eat, about what you drink, about your clothing. Live your life under the King. The pagans run after food, clothing and shelter. And there's a reason why they run. They run because they're gods, the so-called gods. They don't exist. Of course, the so-called duties of Rome never promised to take care of their people.

In fact, if you look at the ideology of the ancient gods, so-called, they were by definition capricious and unwilling to promise anything to anybody you never knew. Keep offering sacrifices, keep placating the gods. You never know what they're going to send your way. It's all over the Greek literature. The gods are capricious, so you better worry and take care of yourself.

But the Lord says, I am not capricious. I don't demand gifts. The gods of the Greek and Roman deities wanted sacrifices all the time. God doesn't demand gifts. He grants gifts. The pagans, Jesus says elsewhere, heap up words. They just shout and shout and shout to their knees, hoping that one will hear them. But your father knows what you need.

So seek first the kingdom. Now. I said this with a little bit of reluctance at the first service, and I invited people to comment as to whether it was a good idea or not, and they said it was. And so I'm going to say this, kingdom is kind of an interesting word in the Greek language. We think of a kingdom as a place once again.

But, so this is a tiny bit of a foray into linguistics. Okay. So different kinds of nouns. And one the most common. Now we think of you. This is what you learned in fourth grade is a noun describes a person. Place your thing, an object like oatmeal or bobcat, like a literal bobcat. It's a thing you don't.

There's no verb that corresponds to the noun oatmeal. You don't oatmeal anybody unless you're really weird. Food fight. But there are a lot of verb of nouns that do have a corresponding verb, like run. You can run, or you can go for a run. You can race, you can race, or you can go to a race or you can play.

That's a verb, or you can go watch a play, right? So it's a noun and a verb and they go together table even you think, oh, a table is a table. But no, you can table a discussion, can't you? Meaning you put on a table in order to deal with it in Greek, not English, but in Greek. That's the language.

The New Testament written in Greek Kingdom is a verbal noun. There's a word that means rule. That word is *bustelo*. There's a word that means king. And there's a word that means kingdom. That's *bossa*. You hear how similar they are. So what it means then is if you enter the kingdom, you enter into the rule or the reign or the guidance of God.

To enter the kingdom again is not to cross a border. It's to say, the Lord is my King. I love him, I serve him, he loves me, and I'm going to live for him. That's what it means to enter the kingdom. To seek the kingdom is to seek his rule, his guidance. Let me say in a different way we pray in the Lord's Prayer.

What do we pray? Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. Those two explain each other, for the kingdom to come is for his will to be done. When you say, May thy kingdom come, you mean, may I live as if indeed I am under his rule? That's what it means to seek the kingdom. And when you seek the kingdom and you seek the king, then you can relax a little bit.

Now, I will admit, I'm going to give you a tiny illustration. I will admit that maybe I was a little bit foolish and maybe I overdid it, but when I was feeling the possibility of a call to ministry, I decided I should go to seminary for one year. I was quite sure, wasn't sure what I should do in my life, but I was sure I should go to seminary for one year.

And we got there with \$1,000 and a couple of thousand and \$53 and no job for me, no job for my wife, and tuition, bills and rent and gas and food and all the rest. And we just believe that God called us who would work out. And I quickly got a job as a night watchman when I could study.

I thought it was great study and get paid to study and walk around the building occasionally. It's wonderful. Paid about \$2.27 an hour. That's not as wonderful. And so it would cover about half of our monthly rent. And the rest was going to come from my wife who was going to get a job. And she kept and kept on coming in second.

And her savings go down and down and down and we really didn't worry because I was sure, and she was sure that God had called us to seminary. Now she still went look for a job and she found one in time. But seeking first the kingdom allows us to relax, seek the kingdom and all these things will be attitude.

God will take care of you. That's not a deal. It's not a contract. It's a promise. God promises to take care of us. It's not. If you work for me, I'll work for you. It's follow me and I'll take care of you. We're in a relationship here. Seek his righteousness. Seek the king. Seek the king includes prayer.

Seeking the kingdom. And the king includes seeking to be a righteous and just and fair minded person. It means parents are fair minded, but their children try to make sure they're doing justice. Loving mercy with their children, using restraint. It's like, work in the workplace. We try to treat everybody well, righteous, or just like everybody in our realm.

We want to see the people God sees. If we follow the kingdom, we don't. We don't turn a blind eye toward the widow and the orphan, the poor and the outcast. First we see everybody God sees because we're going to see the world God's way. Jesus adds this it's after the verses we are reading. He says sufficient to the day is the evil thereof.

It's kind of a, odd phrase, but what it means is this if you're following me, yes, by all means, be busy. In your day. There's evil that comes up in your day, and you should take care of the evil, the problems, the troubles of your day. But don't spend your time. Don't waste your energy worrying about what could possibly happen.

People do worry about what could possibly happen. Had a conversation with somebody, said, my son is almost eight years old and he's still not reading, and you can worry about that. Or you can say, you know what? I just have a feeling you're all educated people. by the time he's 14, he's going to be reading. Pretty sure about that.

You're all not convinced? Or to go back to height? My daughter is the shortest person in her class. What can you do about that? You know, your family. Sort of average height. You'll catch up, I'm pretty sure. And if not, it's not the worst thing that could ever happen. I have some relatives who died of Alzheimer's. I don't want to die of Alzheimer's.

Nobody does. But do you have Alzheimer's today? No. Okay, let's not worry about it. Take care of the troubles in this day. Yes. Your response to what happens today? But the Lord is your king. He's taking care of you. Trust in that and live as the king lives. We'll talk about this more next week. But to seek the kingdom is to seek God's character.

So why do we tell the truth? Among other things, we tell the truth because God is true and he tells the truth. And why are we generous? Well, a lot of reasons to be generous, but one is that God is generous and loves to give gifts to his people. So we're following the rule, but we're also following the character.

We keep promises because God keeps promises. We're going to bring all that we are to God. Let's illustrate that a variety of ways. This man named Matt came in, who was a kind of a faith in work professor, historian, mixed capacities, who, writes in one of his books and I know him a little bit and told me about the fact that in the ancient church, farmers brought their produce.

They didn't give a check. They brought produce. And if maybe they had, an animal, they would bring an animal as a presentation of their life's work to God in the worship service. And they would distribute to

maybe the people who worked in the church grain or meat or milk or cheese. But that's one way people brought their whole selves.

Now, we can't do that today. We can't bring, you know, a portion of our code that we've been working on as an IT worker. that's not the way it works. We have to ask the question, how would God lead me in my work? Let me illustrate personally as lead pastor for now here and lead pastor, other places.

And professor, I know that I have a degree of authority and an ability to ask people to do things that they'll be inclined to say yes to because I'm a person in authority. And some time ago I resolved that I would never tried to talk or coerce anyone into doing anything that I feel I'm pressing on them. I said, hey, would you be interested in this?

You just feel people flinch or pull back, or you can tell me either I've misread their gifts or they're overcommitted. And so somebody says, I don't think I can do that. I try my best to not press it upon them or not try to persuade them, because my goal is not to build my kingdom or advance my cause, but God's kingdom.

And I believe that if they're a disciple, they're following the king. I need to hear what he says more than they need to hear what I say. So it makes sense. That's how, it's it's one way I try to follow the kingdom. And of course, others have other ways of following the kingdom. I want to be careful about this one. There's a man, Clay Porter. That's not his name. He doesn't want me to use his name for reasons that may become clear. Who was, I'll say in his field. Truly a world famous surgeon. And, he works on soft tissue cancers of the neck and mouth, and he's done surgeon surgery on heads of state.

He's been flown 10,000 miles to do surgery on a prime minister. He's the he's the man. He's trained hundreds of of residents and taught people how to do surgery all over the world and had a, you know, prestigious chair at Research Hospital until he began to follow the King in a way that his hospital didn't like. And here's what happened.

He was doing surgeries on these people, special kinds of surgery specific places. So I'm not trying to I'm not trying to get medical advice here, okay? I'm not telling you, this is what you should say to your surgeon. That is not the point. Okay? But on this particular surgery, he began to notice that the people had come out of surgery are doing well.

We're getting so much additional chemo and radiation, and it didn't seem to him to be doing much good. In fact, it seemed to him he's a researcher to be doing no good at all. And he sent his findings out to other people and they said, yeah, we don't see we're not against radiation generally, but this kind of radiation for this cancer doesn't seem to be doing anything.

And he started to tell people that at his prestigious research hospital and other people, the hospital began to say, hey, man, since you're laying you're a surgeon. We take care of chemo, we take care of radiation. He said, well, we're giving them radiation is frying their salivary glands, and some of them are five and 10 or 15 years old, and they can't swallow the rest of their life without a without some water in their hand.

And it doesn't seem to be doing any good. And people are studying this, and other surgery centers are finding the same thing. And he got pushed back hard. You could endanger our livelihood. We could lose



grants. We bought millions of dollars worth of equipment to do what we know is good. And he said, not in this case. And then he had a choice.

Could he pull back and say, done. I don't want to have controversy. I'm going to I'm just going to, you know, do my surgery and, and, stay out of trouble. But he's following the king. And so he views the people he operates on as his neighbors. Love your neighbor as yourself. And he thinks I got to love these people.

So don't go through the rest of their life without saliva or their vocal cords fried. And so he couldn't back off. He also believes that God put enormous healing powers into the human body, which seem to be operating for these people have this kind of cancer. And so again, he couldn't back off. He's following the king. He believes he's been called and gifted to be a surgeon and a researcher, both.

And so he faced the question. Will he stay and just have a quieter life and pull back and keep it to himself? Or will he leave his family in his home and his friends, leave his prestigious chair and go to another hospital that does believe in what he's doing? And he sought the King and the kingdom by giving it all up and starting over God's providence.

His results were repeated and verified over and over again, and God gave him back that which he had to lose. But he risked it all for the king. Well, it's not just those kinds of people, famous people, people with high skills. Debbie and I went home. My wife and I went home for. To Saint Louis for Christmas to be with our children and grandchildren.

And then we what we said we go home to Saint Louis and we come home to Birmingham. Now we leave home to go home. So we got home from home and we got home, a little bit late. And so, you know, got to go to the grocery store and get milk and cheese and, and vegetables to and so we got there late. It was late. And so the cashiers are all gone. You know what's coming next. We have to do self-checkout. One of the most dreaded things in in the West, I mean, they have other problems in the Third World, but self-checkout, I mean, there are very few things that are worse than self-checkout. And once again, you know, we're putting a head of broccoli and it just will not register the way to the broccoli.

And you know, that we drip water from the water that was sprayed in the broccoli, I don't know. And we're trying and trying. And there's a cashier there now there's two kinds of cashier helpers. There's the ones that are kind and sympathetic. And they go, I know it's horrible. I wish I could, you know, I'll help you. And they smile and they make that trip, which is becoming so frustrating into a little bit of joy and, and make a joke with you.

And they pat you on the back and they give you a bag of jujubes and on your way you go. Or you can be a one of those cashier helpers who sit there and scowl at you. These people, I know how old they are. They can't do anything to save their lives. Sitting in judgment. They aren't saying the words, but it's oozing out of their eyes and ears pouring out of their hair. You... incompetence. Or you poor people, glad to help you see if you're if you're glad to help, you're serving the king, aren't you? You're saying, I know it's 945 and I know there's no cashiers. I am glad to help you. And if that man or that woman has in their mind, I want to serve the Lord today by making the shopping experience a little bit happier, just a little bit sweeter.

That's seeking first the Kingdom also. And then there in in between things, there's a man who's been in my life for a long time. His name is Paul Tobin, and he has this idea comes from the Bible. He's a

Christian, that whatever we do, we should do what the glory of God. Can I just I'm going to come back to Paul in a second.

Paul comments on this same issue. He says, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do everything to the glory of God. Same idea to seek the kingdom and to seek God's glory is the same thing. And when Paul says that in first Corinthians ten, it's at the end of a conversation about food, and the conversation is long, complicated.

We don't get into it, of course, today, but it has two facets to it. One is the Christians in Corinth would come to the Lord's Table, and they'd have a regular full sized meal, and not everybody agreed about how to do it. Some people were just spending their time with their friends and they wouldn't spend time with other people.

Is that okay or not at the church just to hang out with people like yourself? And apparently some people who are wealthy would bring, you know, the fat of the land and their friends. Is that okay or not? Seems like it's not a good idea. And then a little bit later, the question comes up, what about food that we're has been offered to an idol now, in those days in Corinth, it was a center of of worship of pagan gods.

So what are you doing when you offer meat to an idol? Well, Paul says you're actually not doing anything. You're just waving meat around in the air because idols don't exist. But a lot of people thought, well, I mean, there's a worship of a false god here. And so Paul says, look, I have counsel for both of these situations, but the overarching principles this whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all the glory of God.

That is. If you're not sure what to do about food, ask yourself this question can I eat this to the glory of God? And if you think to yourself, there is no way I can do this, whatever this is, and say to your glory, Lord, if you can't say Lord to your glory, you shouldn't do it. And if you can say, Lord to your glory, if you have a good conscience, a good moral compass, then go ahead.

That's what Paul says. Now we carry this out in surgery and at the cashier's office. And I was going to tell you now at a sports club, Paul Tobin, whom I mentioned earlier, is the head pro, was the head pro just retired, was the head pro at a large sports complex in which tennis was of maybe the lead sport lead activity and, he was coach for 40 years.

I played for him for 32 years, his various teams. I was on several a couple of his teams, and I noticed people notice about Paul, who was the head pro. He'd pick up trash, you know, outside the outdoor court, just trash. You pick it up as if he was being paid \$9 an hour, and if it rained, there's water on the courts, although there was somebody is supposed to do that for \$11 an hour.

If people wanted to play, he'd go out and get a squeegee and squeegee off the courts and get a towel, wipe off the courts. It wasn't his job, but he was. He was doing it because he wanted to love the people in his club. And what was interesting, he's a believer. He offers everything. The Lord was interesting was the way it transformed the entire place.

If the head pro, the most important person is walking around picking up trash, who can say picking up trash is beneath me? And so it was in kind of a neat place. And if the most important person is on his hands and knees mopping up water, it makes everybody just a little bit quicker to help out, to be part of a team, to not think that's beneath my dignity.

He's picking up trash to the glory of the King. He was tough and he was tender. He knew how to insult someone when they needed it, smack them around a little bit and then lift them back up again. He told one of my daughters once – Doriani, you have the hands of a blacksmith. Nobody knew what that meant, but it wasn't good. You have the hands of a blacksmith. But I love your focus. You never give up on a point. Okay? Tough, tender. The best prose. Sorry. The pro would tell his best players. Doug. Mike. Jerry, you picked the worst possible shot. The only reason it worked is because you hit the ball so hard. Tough. Terrible idea. Tender. It worked because you grew athletic skill.

That was the way he tried to build the Kingdom. Tough and tender and picking up trash in between. Now, where do people get ideas like this? They get ideas like this by meditating on Jesus because you know nothing was beneath him, right? If Paul picked up trash, what about Jesus? He wiped. He wiped people's feet, didn't he? He washed their feet. Work of a slave. Jesus was certainly tough and tender. Tender enough to say to little children, come to me. Pick them up, bless them. Yeah, Jesus was tender. And Jesus was also tough enough to go to the cross. That's tough. So we follow a king who's tender, who cares for little children, who cares for worrisome adults, who cares for all of us.

And he teaches us to be tender. And in Jesus's tough, he faces down his critics. People will call him a blasphemer. Doesn't stop him. He keeps going, even to the point of death on the cross. But he's strong. And so he rises again. And that's the king we follow. That's when we when we seek first the kingdom. That's our king.

What a delight to live under his rule, to live for him. And I pray that you do so this year.

Let's pray - Heavenly father. I do ask that you would give us a desire to seek first the Kingdom Lord, to seek first you as King, so tough, so tender. Nothing beneath you. Caring for us in every way. Giving us good guidance. Guidance we can follow joyfully and well. So Lord, we pray that you would guide us this year. There's nothing magical about a new year. And yet, Lord, it does give us a chance to focus. And so we pray that our eyes would be on you and you as King, and you as the leader of a realm follows your ways.

We pray this all in Jesus name by his grace and favor.

Amen.