

1—Matt. 6:24-33 and The New Commandment

Side 1

The passage we read tonight, that began our conference tonight, Matthew 6:24 is found in the heart of the sermon of the mounts. The sermon of the mount is called, by scripture scholars, the gospel within the gospel. It is kernel, if you will, that literally contains everything that is expanded throughout the entire gospel. Matthew 6:24 begins with the statement that you cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and money. I remember growing up the word that was used there was mammon. I used to think to myself, oh here's mammon, I certainly don't serve mammon, whatever that is. The correct word is money. The passage concludes with, to seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness and all else will be given unto you.

Now, in the gospel, and scripture scholars and unanimous on this, in Jesus life Jesus preached the central notion that Jesus actually preached when he walked on the face of the earth was the kingdom of God. His whole life was given over to proclaiming the kingdom of God. For Jesus the kingdom is everything. There is nothing second, there is nothing third, there is certainly nothing above it. He proclaimed, he taught and he lived in terms of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God that Jesus placed the highest kind of priority on, not just for himself in terms of his life and in his proclamation, but in Matthew 6:24 and following to where you just read he tells those who are following him to seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness and all else will be given.

The kingdom of God is the kingdom of the lamb. There is no other kingdom of God than the kingdom of the lamb. In Revelations, at the close of the book of Revelations in the 22nd verse in the 22nd chapter the seer says, "I saw no temple therein for the Lord God almighty and the lamb are the temple of it in your new Jerusalem, the kingdom of God. And the City had no need of sun, neither of moon to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it and the lamb is the light thereof." The kingdom of God is the kingdom of the lamb. The kingdom that Jesus, the Lamb of God, will hand over to the Father at the end of time. It's the kingdom of the lamb. Seek first the kingdom of God is the proclamation of Jesus. Nothing else is important to him, and he's telling those who are listening to him, nothing else should be important to them. He does not say, seek first the kingdom that benefits you. He does not say, seek first the kingdom of you culture, or seek first the kingdom of a particular state. He says, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. He doesn't say, seek first your own righteousness. Seek first the righteousness by a standard of your culture. Seek first the righteousness by some standard given to you by your state. He says, seek first his righteousness.

Righteousness, or as it is sometimes translated, saving justice as opposed to state justice—righteousness is the conformity of the human will to the will of God. One is not righteousness by conforming to any ??????????. One is not righteous by conforming to anything other than the will of God. Jesus, the Lamb of God, is the ultimate communicator of what the will of God is to humanity. Said another way, the will of the lamb is the will of God. It's that simple. The will of the lamb is the will of God. Or, the righteousness of the lamb is the righteousness of God. There is nothing complicated about it. It is all one. The lamb hands over the kingdom to God at the end of time. The lamb is honored, it is adored, it is worshipped in the kingdom. The lamb reigns in

the kingdom of God. The lamb is worshipped in the kingdom of God. The righteousness of God is the righteousness of the lamb and vice versa, and Jesus is the lamb.

The question we have to ask ourselves as Christians is do we wholeheartedly, perhaps have we ever wholeheartedly sought first the kingdom of God and its righteousness. Have we ever? The church is involved, whether it be Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, the church is involved with a panoply of rules and laws and regulations and morale codes and so forth and so on. But Jesus proclamation is, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all the rest will be taken care of. And so the question, is the kingdom of God really what I am seeking in my life or is it something else? We know, for example, that life has all kinds of emotional ins and outs from fear to romantic love, to anger, to worry, anxiety about money and job and so forth and so on. We all know how these things can come upon us and absorb us and they become our whole life and whatever it may be. But what Jesus is saying is, I don't care what happens, what is critical to do, why I made you my disciple is through it all, regardless of what it takes, seek first the kingdom of God. Seek first, in whatever is happening to you, the will of God is righteousness. Not what the culture would say, not what's good for you, not what the state says, but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Everyday when we pray, perhaps just about every Christian that prays everyday, whether they be Catholic or Orthodox or Protestant, prays the Our Father, and in the middle of the Our Father the only prayer taught by Jesus, there are the words that are the match for Matthew 6:24. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. In the middle of the Our Father, the prayer is that the kingdom of God come to earth, which is that the will of God, that the righteousness of God be done here and now on earth as it is done eternally in Heaven, and that is the prayer. That the kingdom of the lamb, in the middle of the Our Father is the prayer, that the kingdom of the lamb, the righteousness of the lamb come to earth, be. What is obvious and what is clear to everyone, although we don't speak about it, not even in hush tones, is that the kingdom of God can only come, can only be brought about by the means of God. There is no exception. God does not need one speck of evil. Not one lie, not one ounce of greed, not one second of hurting anybody for the kingdom to come in its fullness and completeness. In fact any speck of evil just retards the coming of the kingdom. God is absolutely, utterly independent of evil of any kind.

So, what is obvious is anytime that we do evil we are not self-evidently seeking first the kingdom of God. We are seeking something else. The kingdom of the lamb can only come into being by the means of the lamb, by the way of the lamb. There is no other choice. The kingdom of Christ can only come into being by the way of Christ. The means of Jesus, the way of Jesus is a way of non-violent love of friends and enemies. That's clear, that's for certain. Jesus rejects, in his way, homicide and hate, enmity, cruelty, returning evil for evil, revenge, retaliation. Of course he also rejects other things. He rejects lust, he rejects greed, he rejects lying. There is no way for example that one brings about the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the lamb by lying. It doesn't happen. The father of lies is Satan. When one lies, one brings about the kingdom of Satan, it's that simple. The means that you chose are the kingdom that you create. Jesus teaches a way of unconditional, Christ-like if you will, care—Christ himself is the model for care for concern for love. Love without exception. One of the things Jesus did in his proclamation is he absolutely exploded the notion of neighbor and Judaism. For the Jew the neighbor was only the other Jew and Jesus made it universal to include even the enemy as the neighbor, the Samaritan story and so forth. Jesus, his care, his concern and his love are directed towards all people and therefore

unconcern, un-care and un-love directed towards anyone is impairing the kingdom of God from coming, regardless of their race, their color, their creed, their nationality, their culture, their religion, it makes no difference. Whether they be friend or enemy or Irish or English or Russian or American, it makes no difference. Every moment of un-love, un-concern and un-care towards anybody means that we, when we do that are participating in impeding the coming of the kingdom of God.

However, the other side, which is extraordinary, every act of Christ-like concern, every act of Christ-like care, every act of Christ-like love is part of the mysterious process of bringing the kingdom of God. It is of infinite value. Now, in short what we are saying is that the kingdom of God can only be brought about by the way of God. There must be a consistency between the end desired and the means chosen. We talked extensively in the original workshop on Behold the Lamb, about the issue of the means and the ends and how you cannot have an inconsistency if you want to build a truthful self, you can only build a truthful self by the means of truth you cannot do it by the means of lying. When you lie you build a lying self. If we wish to build a kingdom of God, we have to do it by the means of God. If we wish to build a kingdom, which is exactly the same thing, then we have to do it by the means of the lamb. Said in another way, seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness means nothing short of become God like. The Christian vocation is to be God like. That almost sounds blasphemous to us because our notions of God, even our Christian notions of God are so shot through with pagan mythology, of God of someone like a Zeus, a god of power, of violence and power that crushes and punishes. That is not the God that Jesus proclaims and that's not the way kingdom comes that Jesus proclaims. We are called to be Christ like, and Christ is the incarnation of God. There is only one way therefore to build the kingdom of God. To participate in the building of the kingdom of God and that is by God-like choices in thought, word and deed. And the definition of what is God like does not come from Aristotle or Plato, does not come from Buddha or Zeus, does not come from Hugh Hefner, the definition of what is God like comes ultimate and definitively from Jesus Christ who is God.

Therefore, Jesus new commandment given at the last supper, I give you a new commandment, love one another as I have loved you, so also should you love one another. Jesus new commandment to love as I have loved is the only way to seek first the kingdom of God. There is no other way because Jesus is God incarnate. The new commandment is a call to the imitation of God. All through the gospel Jesus is saying exactly the same thing. You are made in the image and likeness of God, imitate what you are made in the image and likeness of. Be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate, etc. But this is all gets summed up in the new commandment when he says, love one another as I have loved you. To seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness is of course something that one takes on at baptism. It is of course the life commitment of the Christian because it is the direct and central command of Jesus to seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, but a life's commitment can only be carried out moment by moment and therefore seek first the kingdom of God in his righteousness means that moment to moment this is the priority, to love as Christ loved because that is the only way of seeking first the kingdom of God. Nothing is more important and Jesus teaching nothing therefore can be more important in the Christian life than seeking first the kingdom of the lamb and everything, absolutely everything is secondary to it. My job, my house, my life, my family,

my friends, my country, everything is secondary to seeking first the kingdom of God, which in actual practice means is secondary to loving as Christ loved moment to moment to moment.

Now, everything I've said up to now, there is nothing original in it. In fact I try not to be original in the sense of the way original is used today, which is novelty. However it is original in the sense that it returns or origins, lost origins. Origins that take their life from the lamb of God. The way of the lamb of God, the way of Jesus, the way to bring the kingdom, for the kingdom to come, the way to seek first the kingdom of God is by those means that Jesus explicitly teaches us. Moment to moment to moment and with our whole life, but those are means, and I must be clear about this, those are means that absolutely reject violence and homicide and destruction and cruelty. Said another way, those are the means of non-violence and love of friends and enemies moment to moment.

The church and Christians, the church and individual Christians, first world, second world, third world, makes no difference -- the church and individual Christians are involved all over the world in very many, many decent things and very, very many indecent things. But decent and indecent are not gospel categories. Decent and indecent are only cultural standards. What is decent in one society is indecent in another and vice versa. Culturally speaking there is no such thing as a universal sin. There is an abomination here is a virtue over here. They are cultural standards, decent and indecent. They are put together, the culture have these as standards which means the people have them as standards because they help the individual, and through the individual and the culture survive. Decent and indecent in any given culture are what keeps the culture in existence. Just like cultural standards of right and wrong. They help the particular culture survive. It's been found that they work to keep it going. Now it may be that some of these standards that are simply cultural standards are in fact coincide with the teachings of Jesus. That could very well be in some situations that some of the standards that are cultural standards coincide with the teachings of Jesus, and people live them. But that is not seeking first the kingdom of God—that is following a rule that helps you survive.

Side 2

If that, and when and if that rule doesn't help you survive as a individual within the culture, you'll drop it and so will the culture. And so, how one does things to survive in a particular culture can on some occasions coincide with what Jesus taught. And so one will do it, but the contrary is also true, that one will do things contrary to what Jesus taught to survive in the culture, and to support the culture's survival.

Most obvious is, all cultures, nations, states, reject Jesus' teachings of love your enemy. And just about all Christians in all nations, states, universally reject Jesus' teachings of love your enemy. The enemy is the one who threatens the survival of the state, and therefore that particular teaching of Jesus which is required for the seeking of the kingdom of God, because it is loving as Christ loved, and the only way that you can bring about the kingdom of the Lamb is to act as Jesus acted, and He loved His enemies, Gethsemane and Calvary, under the worst sets of circumstances and explicitly taught it. As clear as the teaching is in Jesus, and as clear as it is to follow Jesus means to love your enemies, there's not a culture in the world, not a state in the

world that has that as a standard. And just about every one of them have large numbers of Christians in them, and large numbers of Christians reject the love of enemy that Jesus taught. So also is Jesus' teachings under rejection of violence.

Now, I can just give you one example from the, from the state that I happen to be in, the United States, and that is in the United States' Constitution, only one, only one crime is mentioned, only one. In the entire Constitution, the foundation document, and it's the crime of giving aide and comfort to the enemy—treason. Punishable by death. The total opposite of Jesus' teachings, and I suspect it's the same in about 99.99% of all other states. And Christians to the tune of tens upon tens upon hundreds of millions in the United States live quite comfortably with it. And then when they do things that are consistent with, that are in there, and the code's consistent with following Jesus, they, think they're seeking first the kingdom of God. It is not so. It is not so. Seeking first the kingdom of God means that I am committed to loving as Christ loved, following the Lamb, regardless of whether it's culturally acceptable or unacceptable. Regardless of whether it's gonna result in my own survival or the state's survival or anything else, it means there is nothing that can go above it, in part or in whole. My daily task moment to moment is to love as Christ loved, and that's my lifetime commitment. To seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Look at it this way—that my needs determine what I value. That is, if I have a need and it can be fulfilled by a certain thing I value or consider worthwhile, that certain thing because it fulfills the needs. And if I have a need, I am moved to fulfill it, and I am moved to live out these values, motivated to, simply because this what, this what makes me feel full of life, this is what I feel is good, and so forth and so on, okay? This is, this is, this is just normal kind, a normal kind of thinking about, about you know the human, the human personality. We are just a conglomeration of needs and values and motivations—they all play into each other. And so, for example, when we look we see people that have a need, they have a need for money. They have a need for money. Why do they have a need for money? Because money in any society is the one thing that can procure everything that that society has to offer on Earth. Money will procure everything that the society has to—it is, it is if you would, the need of needs. And so, people know this and therefore they have a need for it. They value it, because money is what it takes to fulfill, you know, if I want a steak, or I want to go on a trip, or I want to, or I want to have clothes of a certain type, or I want to buy a new catechism of the Catholic Church, or something—takes money to do it. And so I want the money. And there's the need, I value it, it's worth something to me. And of course, it takes nothing to see that money motivates. But it's a real motivation, it really does move people because it's, it, it actually it's a need. And it has, it has worth to people.

Now, we know it motivates people because if I were to say, if I were to say here and I were to announce here, say, say I had a billion dollars or something, and I were to announce here, just tonight, just with the few people who are here, you know, 50, 60 people here, and I, you know, and, and, and, and I were to say that, that on January 17th of this coming year that for anyone who comes to the 5:00 mass at Rathmine Church in Dublin, I will give them a million dollars—everyone that comes gets a million dollars. Can you imagine who would be there trying to get in the doors? It would really move them—talk about motivating! Money motivates. However, money is not the deepest need that people have. It's not the deepest need—the deepest need is to

survive, because if you don't survive, the money's no good. We all view the stories every day of it happening. Must survive, or the money's no good. Money, of course, money is of course understood as a way to survival. It's a way that I can have good health care, it's a way—you know it's not just survival physically, but it's survival in terms of all those things that give life, or at least I think give life, you know. I can have clothes, I can have cars, I can have travel, I, I, whatever it is, food or anything else. It's the survival of, you know money does all that, see? Life and also the way of life—money can, money can help us survive in it. It's felt that money protects our survival. It protects us. We can buy burglar alarms for the house or, or, or get a big dog, or whatever—I don't know, and then we, we, we can, we, we you know, we can eat the best foods, or we can, I don't know of all the things but money protects us somehow. We can buy a bodyguard if we want, you know. I saw one of these fellows in, read about one of these fellows in Hollywood, Sylvester Stallone, that actually, Stallone, who actually purchased two men who look exactly like him to walk around with him, so when people try to shoot they won't know which one to shoot at. Money buys protection, see?

And we understand, as human beings, we're vulnerable. We're vulnerable. We may not talk about it much, but every one of us is vulnerable in the extreme. I mean—vulnerable from all kinds of angles and so forth. And money protects. Money helps us buy the pill to get down the cholesterol, and so forth. Or whatever. In other words, we need, we need to survive, we, we desire not not to be. And what is it in the end that we see protecting us? Because people you know, they see. They see that money does protect, and that money gives life, or at least the things they think is life—the trips and the clothes and everything else. So there's something even more basic, if you will, you know, because, because we have to protect the money, after we find the money protecting us. And therefore, the money helps us survive, and therefore we have to make sure the money survives, and the protection dynamic is violence—is violence.

Violence is valued, make no mistake about it. It is valued in the extreme. All over the world, and by just about everyone. It is valued in the extreme. Violence is the biggest business on the face of the Earth. The weapons industry is the single lot, the, the, the business to make instruments to destroy people is the largest single industry on the face of the Earth. And those weapons are sold to military and police and so forth and so on, and when the particular value system or way of life or people in a society are threatened, the Christians and the non-Christians, when the monetary system—our way of life is threatened, our economy is threatened, the Christians and the non-Christians happily call upon the value of violence. To protect, for violence protects. Everything that can be protected—everything of this Earth that can be protected, violence protects it. Country, house, home, life—when all else fails, that's always the way it goes. When all else fails, then we go to violence. Either directly ourselves or indirectly through military and police operations.

Jesus says the primary value is not the protection of our life in this world. He is very clear on that. He couldn't be clearer on that. Jesus says, "If you try to save your life in this world, you will lose it. But the one who loses his life in this world for my sake,"—or her life in this world for my sake—"for my sake, will gain it." Jesus places no value on my survival, your survival on this Earth, or the survival of Ireland or the United States or China or anything else. No value whatsoever. His teaching is seek first not the security of Ireland or the United States, seek first not the security of my house or my health or my whatever the case may be—seek first the

kingdom of God and it's righteousness, which means love as I have loved, moment to moment, and trust that all the rest will be given unto you. Seek first the kingdom of the Lamb by the way of the Lamb, and trust that the Lord of life will take care of all the rest.

And so, in the realm of the kingdoms of the world, in the realm of the kingdoms of the world, not the kingdom of God—non-violent love of friends and enemies, following the way of the Lamb, is mental illness, is absurdity, is craziness. The nations of the world do not turn the other cheek—they do not walk the extra mile, they could care less about loving as Christ loved. When it suits their purposes in terms of survival, they will call on and even follow Christ. When it doesn't suit their purposes in terms of survival, they and those who lead them, and those in them will walk away from Christ. The issue is simply Earthly survival. And that means that the kingdoms of the world will employ on all occasions without exception the use of homicidal violence to do what they want to do - all of them. Jesus teaches, not seek first the kingdom, or the welfare of Ireland, or the United States, or China, or Japan—He teaches seek first the kingdom of God as the primary need that people have. And everything else will fall in place.

The normal Christian consciousness is not that however. It's seek first the kingdom of the world that I happen to belong to, whatever that is, that preserves me. And I will adjust my value system, I'll even adjust the clearest teachings of the gospel, turn them on their head if necessary, to protect the kingdom of the world that protects me. And that goes from the highest to the lowest rank of Christian in this world, and this has been the case since Constantine. Let's see if we couldn't draw a diagram in our minds, okay? On this side we have the kingdoms of the world. And on this side, we have the kingdom of the Lamb—the kingdom of Jesus, the Lamb of God. So we ask, on this side, in the kingdom of the world, on the kingdoms of the world, what is the primary need of the kingdoms of the world? It is to survive. What is the primary need of the kingdom of God—the kingdom of the Lamb? The primary need is to moment to moment seek it, and every day, every momentary daily action, seek first the kingdom of God is the primary need. In terms of the kingdoms of the world, what is the primary value? Again, simply to survive—physically, as a way of life, our economy, whatever the case may be. What is the primary value of the kingdom of God? To be faithful—not to survive, to be faithful. In terms of motivation, what is the primary value of the kingdoms of the world? The primary value is to save our life in this world—whether our life be our personal physical life, our family's life, our country's life—or all the things that we think give life—our way of life, our status in life. And what is the primary value, the primary motivation in the kingdom of the Lamb, the kingdom of God? It is to do the will of God, as taught by Jesus—to love as Christ loved. And finally, what are the means of the kingdoms of the world? The ultimate means of the kingdoms of the world when all else fails is homicidal violence, and whatever else is necessary to protect. The ethics of the kingdom, kingdoms of world are explicitly—they have no ethics. Whatever is necessary to survive is ethical. And what are the means of the kingdom of God to attain the kingdom of God? To follow the new commandment—to love one another, as I have loved you.

Jesus, when He went out to the desert, as you remember He was brought up to a high mountain, and Satan showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he offered Jesus power over them. Power over them—he offered Jesus the opportunity to get to the levels, levels of power in government and to do good with it. He offered Him the glory of political office, and Jesus' answer was—extraordinary answer. He said—is this the answer we would give—“Get

behind Me, Satan. The scripture says you must love the Lord your God and serve Him alone.” Why get behind Me Satan? Because the temptation was to put something higher than seeking first the kingdom of God—it was to put the kingdoms of this world in the place of the kingdom of God. It was to make this world the ultimate standard by which we judge right and wrong, good and evil, and how we should act. It was to replace the kingdom of the Lamb with the kingdom of the Lion. It was to replace God as father, mother, Abba—love—with God as Tyrannosaurus Rex. And so, Jesus rejected the temptation—rejected it. The temptation of power over the kingdoms of the world—he rejected that as the standard of his life, which was an affirmation to seek first the kingdom of God.

Now, what I’m saying is this. Regardless of what anyone of us has ever told you, whether you be Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant—no one can set a standard for you for living your Christian life independent of the standards that Jesus set. And Jesus is absolutely clear, scripture scholars, scholarship is unanimous, his proclamation was seek first the kingdom of God and it’s righteousness. And was a, not just a life commitment, but a moment to moment commitment of what is to be the priority in terms of our needs, our values, and what moves us. And the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of the Lamb, for Christ is God, and Christ is the Lamb of God, can only be pursued and sought by the means of the Lamb, by the means of God. Which are means contrary to the means of the kingdoms of the world.

So let me conclude with this. What I’m saying in particular, since we’re in Ireland, is that all Ireland, all Ireland, isn’t worth the drop of another human being’s blood. Nor is all the United States, nor of all France, nor of all Germany. Nothing, nothing that is Ireland or the United States or Germany, regardless of what it is, regardless of how good we think it is, is superior to breaking with the process of seeking the kingdom of God by the means of the kingdom of God, by the means of Jesus. Who can believe it? Who can believe that all Ireland or all—what Irishman can believe that all Ireland isn’t worth the drop of another human being’s blood? What Frenchman can believe all France isn’t worth the drop of another, another human being’s blood? What German, what Russian, what American? And yet, holy is the Lamb who was slain—not killed, not a killer. Few have believed it, and then many wonder out loud, inconsistently, why it is that the prayer that they pray every day, thy kingdom come, is not answered.