How to Beat the Odds – Part 2

# Seek First His Kingdom

# (Matthew 6:33)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. We're in part two of a series called “How to Beat the Odds”, asking the question, “How would your life be different if you only had six months to live?” Let's begin looking at verse four and five from Psalm chapter 39. This is a prayer of David’s and we’re going to make it our prayer this morning.

"Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered—how fleeting my life is. You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand. My entire lifetime is just a moment to you; at best, each of us is but a breath” (Psalm 39:4-5, NLT).

Last week we looked at the words of James in chapter 4, where he asked, “What is your life?” And honestly, our time on earth is very brief, life is fleeting, and so James said, “You’re a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14). Therefore, because life is so brief, we want to rethink our priorities.

Stephen Covey describes an illustration he saw at a seminar. The speaker showed the audience an empty wide-mouthed gallon jar and then put as many rocks in the jar as would fit. He asked the crowd, "Is this container full?" Of course, everyone said, "Yes."

The speaker then poured some gravel into the jar, shaking it and filling the crevices between the rocks before asking again, "Is it full?" Now by this time the audience was starting to catch on and most of them said, "Probably not."

Next, he poured some sand into the jar. "Now is it full?" he asked. The crowd had learned the lesson and in unison they shouted, "No!" And they were right; because he then filled the jar with water.

Now the presenter asked, "What's the point here?" Someone replied, "Well, there are gaps and if you work hard at it you can always fit more in." The speaker said, "Yes, that’s true, but that’s not the point! The point is, if you hadn't put the big rocks in first, you never would’ve gotten them in!"

In other words, what he’s saying is: Make sure you do what matters most first.

Today we’re going to talk about seeking first God’s kingdom, because this is a habit we all need to develop, and I know that I for one am so easily distracted that I tend to take care of the little nagging details first so I can focus on my priorities, but I believe what the Lord would have us to learn is to ignore them and direct our attention to what really matters. Now obviously, what really matters is something each person must define individually, but Jesus tells us that the list should begin with our relationship to God and our involvement in his purpose for our lives. He said in Matthew chapter 6,

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

The problem is that what we often do is seek first the sand, the gravel, and water, but because our life is so brief we need to make sure that the big stuff gets in first. And so, I want to ask you a very important question and that’s simply, “What is it that matters most to you? What is it that you treasure? What’s the big stuff in your life?”

You see, the thing that Jesus would impress upon us is not to give our best to the things that don’t last; don’t put all of our effort and energy into treasures on earth; into things that won’t last forever. And so, I’d like you to consider where is your treasure? Is it in the things of this world or is it in heaven?

Jesus spoke very specifically and pointedly about this subject in Matthew chapter 6 verse 19 and this is what He said.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21).

You see, it doesn’t matter where you’re going, because you’re still not taking it with you. And so, Jesus said, “Don’t let your treasure be in this world..." And this word translated treasure means a deposit or wealth and so, are you depositing your best, your energy, your wealth and resources into things that don’t last or are you depositing your best into eternal things, those things that would last forever?

Here’s what I want you to consider, I want you to ask yourself honestly, “If you had just six months to live, what is it that would really matter, where would you be depositing your treasure?” You see, this is important to consider, because our Creator God said,

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness…” (Matthew 6:33).

And so, while it’s not wrong to have things, it’s wrong to seek things first. Therefore, Jesus said, we need to seek God first and his righteousness and then he’ll add everything that we need as we seek him first. But we seek first that which lasts forever!

How would your life be different if you realized just how brief life really is, understanding that you’re a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes? I’d be willing to bet that your treasure wouldn’t be on earth; that we would seek first his kingdom, seeking first that which lasts forever, holding on to the eternal, and the way that we would do that, number one, is that we would do what Jesus said in Luke chapter 12, “Watch out! Be on your guard…" (Luke 12:15).

## 1. Be on Your Guard

And so, we must be on guard against all kinds of greed. We must guard against putting our treasure in the things of this world. “Watch out” Jesus said, “Be on your guard,” because your life doesn’t consist in your stuff. Be on guard against materialism and every form of covetousness; that unquenchable thirst for more and more of something that we think we need to be satisfied; and that’s why he told us in the very beginning to love God, to be nice to one another, and he said, “Oh and by the way, number 10…”

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his…servant…his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exodus 20:17).

You see, Jesus, the mastermind of creation, the genius behind humanity knew that “a man’s life doesn’t consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). And so, he makes it very clear that the quality of your life doesn’t depend upon having the right kind of car, the size of your home, or a Jacuzzi bathtub big enough to do laps in. Our greatest need is to have our hearts changed so that we stop seeking treasure on earth and as Jesus tells us in Matthew chapter 6 that we should…

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness (and then he adds) and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

And so, he doesn’t deny that we have certain basic needs. In fact, he says, “Your Heavenly Father knows that you need them” (Matthew 6:32), but he affirms that we’re not going to make our lives better by acquiring more things. And most of us would agree, but if you look at the way we live our lives our actions often reveal that it’s the things that are what really matter. And it’s so subtle that many Christians are infected with covetousness and don’t even know it. That’s why the Bible says in first Timothy,

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 Timothy 6:17).

And it’s true, we all want to have nice things, we all think that when I have these things then life will finally be good; but measured by the standards of the rest of the world, we are those who are “rich in this present world”. It’s you and I. And so, Jesus says,

“Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15).

Watch out! “Don’t store up for yourselves treasures on earth” (Matthew 6:19). “Be on your guard” Jesus said. And then he went on to tell a parable to reveal the dangers of storing treasure on earth in verse 16, he said,

"The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16-21).

You see, if you knew you only had six months to live all these things that you’re pursuing wouldn’t matter a bit. What matters is that you’re rich in the right place, that you’re rich toward God, toward things that will last forever, because “life is a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4.14). And so, we need to “Be on Your Guard”, number one, and then number two, we need to “Be Rich Toward God”.

## 2. Be Rich Toward God

In the parable that Jesus told in Luke chapter 12, this rich farmer had a bumper crop, things were going well, and he saw this prosperity as an opportunity to please himself without any thoughts for others or thought of God. You see, there’s certainly nothing wrong with following good business practices or saving for the future, but this man’s business practices were motivated by covetousness. The Bible is very clear, there are perils to prosperity, and in Proverbs chapter 30 it tells us,

"Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?” (Proverbs 30:7-9).

And so, riches have the potential to choke our spiritual life, our faith, and even the Word of God. Jesus described it this way in Matthew chapter 13, he said,

“The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22).

And the apostle Paul tells us in first Timothy that wealth can create snares and temptations giving you a false sense of security. In chapter 6 he wrote,

“People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction” (1 Timothy 6:9).

So, Jesus saw the selfishness of this rich man, this farmer, and he said that he was a fool, because he’s made it clear that life, success, or security don’t come from an abundance of things. Instead of holding onto everything, our treasure won’t be on earth, and we’ll see everything as God’s. We’ll be rich toward God being generous with our resources and our time because love gives. The Bible tells us this in John chapter 3,

"For God so loved the world that he gave…” (John 3:16).

God demonstrated his love, he showed us how to love, by giving the very best that he ever could’ve given; his one and only Son. And so, we want to be rich toward God because love gives, and we can’t keep it anyway. Jesus warns us, moths and rust will destroy our treasure, and if not, thieves will break in and steal it. And so, one of the greatest ways that we can give to God is to give to people who are in need. In fact, once Jesus was telling a story in reference to the judgment on the Last Day and he said that the nations will be gathered before him and he’ll separate the people from one another. There will be those who knew him and those who didn’t and in Matthew chapter 25 he says to those who knew him,

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (Matthew 25:35-36).

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' (Matthew 25:37-39).

"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).

How would your life be different if you recognized that you only had six months to live? Would you be rich toward God, acknowledging that everything you have comes from him, and making every effort to use what he gave you for the good of others and for his glory. You see, when we put our treasure in heaven, we don’t hold tightly to the things that don’t last, we live our lives open handed because our treasure is being deposited in heaven with God. Jesus said, “Be on your guard, be rich toward God, and number three be radically kingdom minded.

## 3. Be Kingdom Minded

You know, I try to be kingdom minded, I try to focus on what matters, but the problem is that I often don’t. I get distracted and I find myself focused on things that don’t matter, but if I run things through the filter of “Would this matter if I only had six months to live?” When I do that it helps me to focus my attention and helps me to be kingdom minded.

The apostle Paul, toward the end of his life, was in a prison chained up to a guard and if you would’ve asked him what matters, you know, “Paul, you've got 6 months to live, what do you want to say?” What Paul said in Philippians chapter 3, verse 7 and 8, might’ve been his advice to us. He said looking back over life,

“Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him…” (Philippians 3:7-9).

Whatever was to my profit, all those things I thought I needed and wanted to do, even those things that were good, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What’s more, I consider them rubbish. Everything I once thought was important, Paul said, is nothing, it’s rubbish, compared to knowing Christ. And so, what really matters? It’s those things that last forever!

People matter. Male and female created in the image of God are always going to matter. Maybe the ones that you’re sitting with right now, they matter. Your kids matter, your parents matter, your brother or sister that you’re not getting along with right now matters. The people that live next door to you, that you work with, or you went to high school with who don’t know Christ, they matter. People who are in need, children with Compassion International, they matter. Helping those who are without matters. Showing people the love of Jesus matters.

I’ve experienced firsthand how child sponsorship changes lives, because it’s changed my life, it’s changed the children’s lives, and I’ve seen it because I’ve been sponsoring children through Compassion International for almost 20 years now. When I first made that decision to sponsor a child, Eyob Tesfaye Gabisa was waiting for me, and I’m so glad I said yes. Today he has grown out of the program, he’s 26 years old and living in Ethiopia. But that wasn’t the end of my sponsorship, because several years after sponsoring Eyob, Dana and I sponsored Mary Ann in the Philippines, and then we sponsored Bishnu in India, and now we have sponsored Solomon in Ghana.

Today if God is calling you to sponsor a child, I would encourage you to go out to the sponsorship table in the reception area after the service and look at the children who are waiting for you, waiting for a sponsor. Because as a child sponsor you can share your love, through your prayers and your letters, letting them know that their lives matter.

Pastor John Talcott

Christ's Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

April 29, 2018

[www.cccemmitsburg.org](http://www.cccemmitsburg.org/)

*Graphics, notes, and commentary from LifeChurch, Ministry Pass, Preaching Library, and PC Study Bible.*

*Scripture from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.*