

Grace to Live – The Secret To Life Is One Thing

Matthew 6:33 | Sunday, October 28, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

GRACE TO LIVE

THE SECRET TO LIFE IS ONE THING

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We continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount. It's a very famous sermon, maybe the most famous, greatest sermon ever preached -- Matthew, chapters 5, 6, and 7. Our title today is: "The Secret To Life Is One Thing." Let's go to scripture. **Matthew 6:33: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."**

We've been working our way through this section in the Sermon on the Mount. It really begins with Jesus teaching us about the power of money. He tells us that there is this potential that money has in our lives to master us, to be the master of our souls. There is a certain spiritual danger that accompanies that, because we are blinded by its power. He tells us this ingenious little story to help us grasp that truth. He tells us that if the light within us is darkness, how great is the darkness. It seems a bit like a riddle, but the idea is that we come into a room, and if we take light in as darkness, we are really in trouble. That means that the increase of light will not help us, because we see light as darkness.

What he means by that is that we interpret the world according to the loves of our heart. You could say it like this: We see what we want to see, and we interpret all that comes at us according to those deep desires. Jesus tells us if we love money we will begin to believe this false system of beliefs that enslave our souls and block out the light. He tells us you just can't have multiple masters. You will love one and hate the other.

This is strong language. When we dealt with this topic, we acknowledged that money is a practical reality. We pray for God to meet our needs. We teach our kids to be responsible, to work. We try to put it in the proper context, but there is a spiritual reality here that is very liberating when we come into it in Christ.

Now, here's what's interesting. As soon as that happens, as soon as I'm challenged to make God the master of my soul and to give it all to him, what happens? I worry. Right? I've got six kids! They're expensive! And you know, there's no decline in this graph. I don't know how they do it, but they find ways to get my money! When you start to think about the challenges of life and provision, it's so easy to think: "Alright, if I follow God, will I have enough?"

Jesus so compassionately takes us through this section where he practically deals with anxiety and fear and tells us: **Trust the Father.**

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Eddie Copeland preached a beautiful message last week, right? It was really good. I streamed on-line bits and pieces as my wife and I were away, then I watched the whole thing later. I was so grateful. Sometimes the Church has not dealt well with these issues. The distinction that Eddie made between anxiety and mental health issues was so helpful. We have not always shown the right compassion to those that suffer. Just the statement he made that if that is your particular plight, please don't believe that that's just reduced down to a lack of faith. That accusation is not helpful. Right?

Jesus comforts us with this truth: **You can trust God.** Then this verse, Matthew 6:33, is one of those verses that is really worthy of isolated consideration. It's one of those verses that captures a lot of truth and summarizes it in a simple form. I don't think it's an overstatement to say the secret of life is found in one thing and it's given to us in this verse.

Are any of you old enough to remember the movie *City Slickers* with Billy Crystal? He goes through a life crisis, so he goes for two weeks out into nowhere to herd cattle to solve his life crisis. Jack Palance plays the role of a rugged cowboy. You are afraid of this guy. He just looks mean. They are riding along on their horses and Palance says to Billy Crystal: "Do you know what the secret of life is?" Billy Crystal looks at him and goes, "No, but that's why I'm here. I want to know." Then Palance holds up a finger: "This is the secret to life." Billy Crystal says, "Your finger is the secret to life?" He says, "It's one thing. One thing." Of course, what's the question you ask? "Well, tell me. What is that one thing?!" Palance tells Billy Crystal: "That's what you have to figure out."

Now, Jesus is wiser than Jack Palance. He actually tells you. He tells you what the secret to life is. If you'll allow me to provide a nuance, here is how that statement applies to this verse. Just following the context of the scripture here: **Jesus should be the master of your soul. There are other masters. Be careful. You can trust God. Really, he's the only one you can trust. Give all your fear and anxiety to him. Faith is a remedy for you.**

But then you want to ask, "Okay, but what do I do?" Because faith can feel passive, like, "Okay, I just need to trust God." It can feel inactive. This statement captures for us what to do. **We are to pursue God's kingdom and God's righteousness. We are to seek God's kingdom, God's righteousness. That's what we actively do as followers of Jesus Christ.** It's what we want to give ourselves to day in and day out. There are so many applications to this.

Let me capture your interest by being as controversial as I possibly can. Let's talk politics! Ah. We have a midterm election coming up. People get crazy! I mean, crazy. I was at a wedding last night and found out that the primary suspect for the mailing of these pipe bombs lived in the same town that I grew up in. He was like a peer and I played soccer against him. He went to North Miami Beach. I went to North Miami Senior High. We were rivals back then. I talked to three or four guys at the wedding last night who knew him and said, "Man, we never felt like he was right." I don't mean that in a mean way. We just always had concerns. That's a subjective evaluation.

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Oh, sorry, I forgot where I was going. Politics. Okay, people. We say this over and over and over again. God is not a Republican. He is not a Democrat. If you are making the pursuit of God and the kingdom of God synonymous with a political party, you are off. It's not that the positions and the policies don't matter. It's not that the character of the people don't matter. All of that matters very much, and Christians are to be involved. We are to participate. But what keeps us sane is the pursuit of God and his kingdom, realizing we stop acting Christian when we lose sight of this one thing. This is true in every area of our lives.

So, let's talk about it if you're still interested. I'm out of here. I'm headed to the Republican National Office. Okay, we'll try to answer two questions: What is it? And how do I seek it?

I. What is it?

The whole idea of a kingdom is a bit lost on us. It's not a form of government that most of us have had any experience with. It's a foreign idea to us. Maybe just to get started, it will help you if you think of Disney World -- without the lines, without the expensive fees, better food. The characters are actually real; they're not mystical, and you can fly. Just an introduction to what the experience of the Kingdom of God might be like. But of course, it's very different. There's a King. It's Jesus, and he gives light to the city. He is magnificent. We worship him. He makes all things new.

Jesus is using this image to talk to us about personal restoration, and then restoration of God's creation. God comes in, changes us, transforms us, and then uses us to spread that blessing, to spread his Kingdom. Just look at this. This is the theme of the entire section in Matthew. We keep looking at these bookends. It's very helpful. When it starts, Jesus is beginning his ministry. It says in Matthew 4:23: "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people." So God sends his Son. He proclaims the gospel. The word gospel means "good news." He proclaims the good news of God's reign. Then he begins to address the lostness, the brokenness, the pain of the people that he is ministering to, the lostness of the world, the brokenness of the world.

Then we come to the end of this section in Matthew 9 with the same thought. Verse 35: "And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction." What we have is Matthew 4 and Matthew 9, this group of chapters. In between you have the Sermon on the Mount. He is proclaiming the gospel. He is teaching. Then you have chapters 8 and 9, which are primarily the stories of Jesus healing people, alleviating suffering, applying the compassion of God to the lives of people.

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And we are told if we follow Jesus we give ourselves to this pursuit. We give ourselves to the proclamation of this good news, this transformation that God brings to individuals, to people, to communities, to churches, to marriages, to all kinds of relationships, and that we spread the mercy and the compassion and the power of Jesus Christ. If you are a Christian, you are the light of the world. This is the call of God for your life and for my life.

Just a thought, not to get too technical or deep, because I don't want to lose you, but when we talk about righteousness, I think it helps to think in three ways.

- First, because of what Jesus does for us, God makes you right with him. When you trust in Jesus Christ, there is the gift of the forgiveness of sin and your position with God changes. You are right with him. It's a gift. You don't earn it. You receive it by faith.
- And then, in Christ we seek to do what's right. Much of the Sermon on the Mount challenges us to a whole new righteousness, a whole new inside out internalization of truth, doing the right thing.
- Then we seek to make things right. We desire to spread that which pleases God and his reign and his rule.

All of that is introduction. We really want to focus on this second question: How do I seek it?

II. How do I seek it?

If you are saying to me, "Brian, this is the one thing that I give myself to do, how do I do it?" I need to apologize, because I don't think you are going to like the first part of it. It's a term that's used in the Bible a lot and we don't have good feelings when we hear it, but it is the place to begin. I want to show you that right from the scripture. Today we are looking at a few extra verses to really fill this out biblically. You'll see it here, and the word is "repentance." Repentance really gets a bad rap, but it's actually a very powerful, liberating, scriptural truth.

When Jesus comes to begin his ministry, we are told John the Baptist comes to prepare the way. "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea." Now look at his message. **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." It's a message of the kingdom. This is how you pursue the kingdom.** This is how you experience it, and the message he gives is one of repentance.

For this is he (that's John the Baptist) who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

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“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord;

make his paths straight.’”

What’s happening? 800 years before John the Baptist showed up on the scene, 800 years before Jesus showed up on the scene, Isaiah prophesied: “Listen, there’s going to be a forerunner. There’s going to be one who comes to prepare the way for Jesus. This is preparation for receiving. So John comes as that one, to prepare you and me to receive the kingdom, and his message is one of repentance.

Next, Jesus begins his public ministry and what is his message? “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** This is how it starts and I think it would help if you’ll allow me to jump to Acts chapter 3 to give you an overview of the benefits of repentance.

Peter here is proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. A man has been healed and a whole controversy has ensued. You see, what’s happening is there is this proclamation of this message and a help to people that are hurting. God will often flip the order, and that’s what happens. They come into the temple. There is a lame man. It’s very applicable for this whole section in Matthew 6. What do they say? “Silver and gold have I none, but what I give you I give to you in the name of Jesus.” And they heal him!

We think that our ability to be used by God is directly tied to our natural resource, but it was pretty effective. They had no money, but they healed the guy. Now they are inviting people into the kingdom, and this is what they tell them: **“Repent, therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you.”**

So, three things happen when we repent.

- One is cleansing. We are cleansed and forgiven. “That your sins may be blotted out.” A guilty conscience is healed. Shame and guilt are removed.
- Secondly, refreshing comes.
- Third, hope. We look for the return of Jesus Christ and the sense of hopelessness is replaced with a present moment hope, looking for the return of the Lord Jesus.

Cleansing, refreshing, hope.

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This week my wife and I engaged in a significant disagreement. We are grateful to the Lord that we've learned how to fight, that we don't fight like we fought when we first got married. It's difficult, but it's largely absent of the destructive elements that were once there -- very painful and very destructive.

We've learned that for us in marriage, it begins with repentance. Many times it's the next morning. We purpose to work through it, purpose to get right. This was one of those occasions where we had the initial conversation. We had the backup conversation. We had the backup to the backup conversation. And we were just like: "We don't agree."

So we exit that conversation with: "You know what? I need to look at myself, because I'm so convinced." I'm just going to be honest. This is therapeutic for me. You are my counselor and I'm just confessing to you. I really don't want to do that in the moment. Emotionally, I want to cling to the fact that I'm right, and I'm really convinced, sweetheart, that I am. Can I tell you what a relief it is when you say, "Okay, Lord, help me to get the log out of my own eye. What is it that I'm hearing? What is it that I'm being told?"

There is an exchange that takes place in that moment. This is where the refreshing comes. The moment you do that, you say "God is in control and I'm not." You have to lay down control to stop blaming, stop judging, stop insisting that you're right. All of you look guilty right now. But, what happens is, this is the freedom that's ours in the kingdom. When you begin to experience it, you close the gap between the incident and the repentance. You start running to God. It's better. It's better at Disney World, right? I don't even like Disney. I'm not sure why I'm using it. I lost half of you with: "I don't like Disney," didn't I?

Let's move on -- just getting a biblical overview that this is a blessing. It's really a way of looking at transformation, of change. We have a church in our area that has bumper stickers and T-shirts saying: "No perfect people allowed," so I can't go to church there. No perfect people are allowed. Just kidding. The pastor is a friend. I think they're phrasing cleverly a very helpful truth. "You are welcome here. You are accepted here." And we want that message to go out loud and clear. That's where we start.

What we then add to it is, "You know what? **Jesus wants to transform you. He wants to change you. This is entrance into the kingdom. It's marvelous. It's good news.**

#1: How do I seek God? If you're listening attentively you realize: I begin with God in the same way I continue with God my entire life: **Repentance**. So what's #2? **Faith**.

When you go through chapters 8 and 9, where you see Jesus in one healing after another -- just miraculous event after another, it's powerful. You encounter who God is in Jesus and how he is bringing renewal and restoration and

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transformation. Over and over and over again (I'm just giving you two or three examples) he calls you to faith. **He calls you to trust in him.**

To the centurion Jesus said, "Go let it be done for you *as you have believed.*" You see this kind of thing over and over again. Another example is chapter 9, verse 22. "Jesus turned and seeing her he said, 'Take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well.' And instantly the woman was made well." Again, "Then he touched their eyes, saying, according to your faith be it done to you." All kinds of miracles are happening.

We really twist this. We say, "Okay, I receive God's power. I experience God's kingdom by faith." And soon, what we do is put our faith in faith. It's up to me to rally my belief so that I believe in God. But if you carefully read the accounts, for the most part no one is easily believing. You don't have a life-threatening disease or a loved one who is on the brink of death and say, "Oh, this is no big deal. God's got it. Nothing to it." You find every encounter, no matter how much you walk with God, to be a challenge to your faith.

What we are really taught in this account is: God is so awesome! He is so powerful and so loving and so wise that even with your little bitty faith, you can connect to God and transformation can come. Just use whatever faith you have.

Two weeks ago I preached a message on the power of money, right? In the interim, a national speaker that I've gotten to know through Church United called me. His whole ministry is in this area of helping people live generous lives. He tells me, "Man, I listened to the message. It was great! It was a good message. Thank you. I hear a lot of messages, a lot of teaching, and there was some good stuff." He gave me some specific affirmation. I was like, "Wow! Look at me! I'm doing great!"

Then, Eddie preaches this message on anxiety and fear. And then this week it's like God emptied out my bank accounts. He said, "Well, you're doing so well, you've got so much faith for money, let's put a little bit of it to work!" I'm like, "Well, no, Lord. I was just teaching on it." Right? Just to be completely transparent, we are involved in this renovation project -- new speakers, new video walls. You know, we've had some surprises in the last five days, and they're not the kind of surprises like you find under the Christmas tree. Then we had a major tenant call us Friday saying, "Hey, we're giving you our 30 day notice." It's \$50,000/year in income that we receive from that tenant. That's part of our budget. I met with the elders briefly today and as we were sharing that there was this overwhelming consensus: Trust God. He provides. He is faithful.

I tell you that little story to say this. This is how you experience the kingdom. If you're here this morning and you're just getting knocked down, this is an occasion for you to repent and trust in Jesus, to start examining your own life and say, "Okay, Lord, use this to bring transformation. Bring the impurities to the top. Show me and help me. Help my unbelief

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so that I can trust in you, because this is an occasion where you want to bring your reign and rule.” God doesn’t want to just stop the leak. He wants to bring transformation to you and to others.

I’ve got to stop here because I’m running out of time. I’ve only preached about 30% of the message, but that’s okay. Let me give this illustration for how it may work in your life. Because you may be here and think, “You know what? Brian, this is all great, but I’m suffering, and it’s not getting better, and it’s been going on for a long, long time. It’s really painful.”

I don’t want to be insensitive. I want to fill you with faith for Jesus to meet you. But I want to tell you that he has a bigger agenda. **He wants you to know the joy of being a blessing to others, and he does this in a myriad of ways.**

When I was first beginning in ministry, I had a problem with my jaw. I would preach on the weekends and I would get these really horrible headaches. My jaw was out of alignment. So I went to various people, all kinds of doctors. Finally, they were saying, “Okay, we’re going to do surgery.” I said, “What’s the surgery?” “Well, we cut you open and we...” I’m like, “No, I don’t think so. It sounds like an experiment more than a remedy.” No offense to surgeons who might be present. I’m certainly pro-medicine.

So, my daughter calls me in the last couple weeks and says, “Dad, remember you had this jaw problem?” I said, “Yeah, I remember.” She said, “I’ve got a jaw problem. How did you get rid of it?” I said, “Well, I explored all the options. None of them worked, so I prayed, and God took it from me. God removed the problem. It was amazing.” She said, “Well, why aren’t you praying for me? I have a jaw problem?” I said, “Well, I know I’m a prophet, but come on!” Then the craziest thing happened. Now, don’t get fearful when I tell you this. I started praying for my daughter, and every now and then I started getting this little pain in my jaw. I said, “Lord, this girl that you gave me – God help me!”

Here’s what happened. This is the beauty of it. Every time that happens, you know what I do? I pray for her. It’s not a big deal. It’s not excruciating. I don’t have this fear, like: “Oh, this is coming back. She’s going to get healed and I’m going to be afflicted.” That’s like Raising Children 101, right? Sorry, I’m in a rare mood today, I guess.

God has a bigger agenda than us just living in full comfort in the moment. There are people today who are in deep, excruciating pain because of a shooting that happened at Douglas High School. The reality is, most of us who aren’t confronting that in this moment, to some degree, though we grieve over it, we move on. **The world is a hurting place, and God wants you to be the light in the world that brings hope in Jesus Christ, and transformation in Jesus Christ.**

He calls us, sometimes, into the suffering of the world. Sometimes he heals. Sometimes he gives grace for the affliction. He uses us to be agents of healing. He uses us to be agents of grace. But it’s glorious, because a great blessing is to turn outward, to live a generous life so that others might experience the blessing of Jesus. Amen?

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