

What is your top priority in your life? What is your number one goal? Some of your priorities might include losing weight, staying healthy, working part-time for something to do and secure your retirement, have a deeper relationship with your grandchildren, spending time with friends. Those are all good priorities. But they're also earthly. In other words, all of those priorities have to do with the here and now, this life, and not the life to come.

According to the Bible, as we think about our priorities in life, God wants our top priority, our number one goal, to be something that is not of this world. That number one priority is to be something higher than staying healthy. It's supposed to be deeper than recreational activities in the Villages. It supposed to be more spiritual than just visiting the grandchildren. As we think about our top priority in life, God wants us to look up – to look away from this world, and to look heavenward, and to focus on something else. Today, we're going to talk about what that something else is, that top priority, and how it affects the way we look at the things that happen in our lives. So Christian, Focus Your Life On What Really Matters.

Jesus spoke about this in our Gospel lesson for this morning. Jesus was able to look into the hearts of his listeners, and as he did that, he could see that many of them had worldly goals. They might have looked spiritual on the outside, because they were listening to Jesus, but on the inside, they were worldly. "My top priority in life is to make good money," some of them were probably thinking. "My top goal in life is to be entertained. What's important to me is to be popular."

Look at how Jesus addresses their priorities in verse 24: "Woe to you who are rich," Jesus said to them, "for you have already received your comfort." In other words, their life might be comfortable now, but it wouldn't be comfortable in the life to come. Verse 25: "Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry." Those people with a worldly outlook on life might be well-fed now, but they would someday be hungry in the life to come. "Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep." Those people with worldly goals would mourn and weep in the life to come. Verse 26: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets." People in the community may speak highly of you're achievements, but in the Bible the false prophets received similar praise, and God shipped them all off to hell.

Jesus wasn't condemning people because they had money, or because they had food or friends. What Jesus was condemning, was their lack of spiritual life. Their whole life was all about going to work, doing recreational activities, enjoying time with friends – having the good life, right here, and right now. It all seemed good on the outside, but on the inside, they had no faith, no thought of the life to come, no trust in Jesus. Inside, there was nothing spiritual at all. And that would come back to haunt them in the life to come.

This causes us to ask ourselves, "what is the focus of my life?" It is true, that we come here, and we listen to the word of God, just like those people listened to Jesus. But on the inside, am I really just a worldly person? I like to think that I am spiritual, but really, is my number one concern spending time with friends or family? Is my number one concern in life recreation? Is God, his Word, his sacrifice for my sins, does that even make the top five of the things that I care about most in my life?

We all struggle with this. We live in a world that worships and adores the physical, earthly things of life. The Word of God, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, my future existence

in the life to come – these are things that the world shakes its head at. And that affects you. It affects the way you think. Your priorities and my priorities in life are quite often upside down, backwards, worldly – God is at the bottom. If we are honest with ourselves, we must confess that at times, we have sinned this way. “Woe to you,” Jesus says this morning.

But what a comfort it is to know that Jesus, who spoke these words of woe, also speaks words of comfort to you. “I forgive you,” he says. Think of the sacrifice Jesus made to so that he could say, “I forgive you.” He did what he talked about here in our Gospel lesson – in verse 20, Jesus talked about being poor. When Jesus died on the cross, he was poor, he was penniless – worth nothing in the eyes of the world. In verse 21, Jesus talked about hunger. Very likely, Jesus suffered great hunger on the cross – there is no record of Jesus eating as he was tried and tortured. In verse 21, Jesus talked about weeping. Shortly before Jesus died, the Bible records how Jesus wept loudly because the people of Jerusalem had rejected him. In verse 22, Jesus talked about being hated, excluded, insulted, and rejected. All these things describe what Jesus went through as he died on the cross.

Why did he do it? What was his top priority? You know the answer. His ultimate purpose was to be a sacrifice for your sins, and for the sins of the whole world. His ultimate purpose was to make it possible for you, a sinner, to be forgiven, and to go to heaven. That was his top priority, that you would someday be able to spend an eternity with him in the life to come.

What Jesus did for us affects how we look at our lives here on this earth. We have lots of things we want to do while we are alive. But our top priority is to worship Christ with our lives, to serve him, to obey him, and to share him with others. Christ is number one. Because of what he did for me, that’s why our number one focus can’t primarily be on earthly, worldly things.

The popular idea of happiness is this: having the right circumstances. Its what I call the “when and then” thinking. When I get out of school, then I’ll be happy. When I get a job, then I’ll be happy. When I have kids, then I’ll be happy. When the kids leave home, then I’ll be happy.” Today Jesus tells Christians in a troubled world. Heh, Christian, count your blessings. You don’t need “when and then” thinking. Right now, right now, “You are Truly Blessed!”

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” You and I know we are not members of the spiritual honors society....We know we are not setting righteousness records we know we are not too impressive: spiritually, morally, ethically. We realize our spiritual net worth is at zero. But Jesus says, "Divine blessing is coming to you who are spiritually bankrupt....because i'm announcing to you today," The doors of my kingdom are wide open to the likes....of you."

Not a spiritual penny in your pocket. But wait, God gives you the kingdom. You are rich before God through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus gave you his righteousness and died for your and my sins. "Is it possible? Is it really possible....that someone with my grades could get into Harvard?" Yes, it is, You are truly blessed. You are spiritually poor, but God gives you His kingdom.

“Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.” You know how to satisfy your spiritual hunger and thirst. You know the Lord Jesus Christ as the Bread of Life, and they drink deeply of the living water that He provides. In other words, they make faithful use of the means of grace, the Gospel of Christ in Word and Sacraments. They like to make the Word of God part of their daily routine. They love to assemble regularly with fellow believers to hear

God's Word proclaimed. They know God forgives their sins day by day, and that they will stand among the righteous on the day of Judgment. God satisfies them.

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh". This mourning primarily expresses sorrow over sin, one's own sin. Stupid things we did in our past. But Jesus comes to us today and puts a smile on our faces. Jesus says, "I have good news for anyone crying over sin....you can find comfort, and forgiveness, and true soul consolation in my kingdom." And if you're fighting back tears of sorrow over loss or physical pain or emotional distress or loneliness or alienation or rejection, I just want to say again as tenderly as I can, `I have good news for you today: you're gonna find comfort and soul consolation in my kingdom, so mourners...."mourners....come on in, the kingdom doors are wide open to you." I will wipe every tear from your eyes. I will provide you with comfort and strength in every tribulation, and finally eternal life in Heaven. There's a metaphor in Psalm 56:8 of God having a bottle with your name on it and with my name on it...Every tear that we've ever shed has been gently collected and put in that bottle where God can see it....and be involved with it. And sort of be in that suffering moment with us. I know how soul-wrenching sorrow can be so I collect every tear; I put it in a bottle; i'm there with ya--in it, through it. Ya know there are stamp collectors in the world; there are baseball card collectors in the world..you might think of God as a tear collector.

"Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you, and insult you and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man." These are things that happened to those disciples. Verse 23: "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets." These things Jesus said to those disciples, he also says to you. Once you become a Christian, once you believe that Jesus Christ has taken your sins away by his amazing sacrifice, once you believe that someday you will be with him in the life to come, once you believe that, your number one priority in life changes. You become less worldly. You still care about your job, and your family and friends, and the other things you have in this world. But your number one goal changes. To worship Christ, to serve him, to share him with others – that becomes the top goal in life.

And when that happens, the Devil will do the same things to you as he did to those disciples. Who knows what the Devil will do to you? Perhaps he will cause you to be poor and hungry. Perhaps he will bring great sadness into your life. Perhaps he will work it out that people will insult you and reject you because you're wearing your faith on your sleeve.

But if your trust is in Christ, if your goal in life is to worship him, and to rely on him no matter what, then even those troubles won't bother you. Because today Jesus promises you that you, too, can "rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven."

May God bless you with this kind of perspective, with this kind of focus, with Christ as your top priority. May he give you strength to look above and beyond the pleasures and sorrows of this world, because there is something greater, something deeper, something that will last forever. May you find it in Jesus. Amen.