

The Main Thing

Part 1 – Keeping The Main Thing The Main Thing

I want to begin this message with a question: Who can tell me the answer to this?

What is the great Aussie dream? What are the things that people aim for in life?

- To own your own home?
- To be financially independent?
- To be healthy and strong?
- To have a close-knit family?
- To be happy?
- To travel?
- To get an education?

On a Scale of 1-100, how would you rate these in importance?

But here's another question: How important are they to God? Give me a figure.

In reality, people are aiming for most, if not, all of those things.

ILLUS – A number of years ago, I heard a message, and although I can't remember how the preacher developed his theme, a phrase got stuck in my brain: Keep the main thing, the main thing.

I want you to remember that phrase: Keep the main thing, the main thing, because that's what I want to talk about.

There's nothing necessarily wrong with any of those goals we just mentioned.

As long as you realise that they're not the main thing.

Anyone who has surrendered his life to Christ has received a totally new set of priorities for his life.

2 Cor 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

If you had to choose one thing in this life that God wants us to give priority to, what would it be?

Would you include any of those things on the list?

What is God's priority? What does His Word say?

2 Cor 5:17-19 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (18) Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, (19) that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

How many of you would like to know what your ministry is?

Paul says that the result of being a new creation in Christ is that we have been entrusted with the ministry and message of reconciliation.

The message that John the Baptist preached in preparation for the coming of Jesus was the message of reconciliation.

The first message Jesus preached was the message of reconciliation.

The last command Jesus gave before He ascended into heaven was that we are to preach the message of reconciliation.

Mark 16:15-16 And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. (16) He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

We call this the Great Commission – because we have all been commissioned to preach the gospel.

What do you think is really on God’s heart?

Jn 3:16 heart of Christianity – God so loved...

It doesn’t say that He loved us so much that He gave us jobs, or houses, or nice families, or fat bank accounts.

But He loved us so much that, through Christ, He reconciled us to Himself.

Reconciliation – this is the main thing.

If this is true, how is it that we Christians spend so little of our time, treasure, and talents in pursuit of this goal?

We, the church, so often point the finger at the world, and say, “So sad, poor misguided creatures, pursuing materialistic things.”

But how much of our energy is spent in the exact same pursuits?

Of course, the church has its goals too.

I love worship.

ILLUS – Over the last 30 years, I’ve devoted a lot of time to studying worship. I’ve played guitar, bass, drums, piano, blues harp, written items and praise and worship songs, led worship, organised musicals and concerts, written articles and books, recorded four albums, conducted seminars and workshops, and taught inter-denominationally and internationally.

I love worship.

I love Bible study.

ILLUS – When I came to Christ, it was like God downloaded into me an insatiable desire for His word. I read my Bible on the way to work, morning break, lunch, afternoon break, on the way home in the train.

I love Bible study.

I believe in fellowship.

ILLUS – In the last 34 years, I’ve missed church only one Sunday.

I believe in service – my life is devoted to serving God – I hope yours is too.

Worship, Bible study, fellowship, serving – and there are lots of other important things that we as Christians do.

But I wonder if just for a moment we could look at this with an eternal perspective.

What’s it going to be like when we get to heaven?

First, there’ll be plenty of time to worship. Some say that Elvis will be heaven’s music director. I have my doubts, but maybe we can all sit around the piano singing “Love Me Tender”.

And there’ll be plenty of time for fellowship. We’ll be able to sit around and remember the good old days. And with the benefit of hindsight, we’ll be able to see things in a different light. Stephen will be able to laugh about the time he got stoned. Paul will be able to tell us what it was like to be beheaded. It will be a great time of fellowship.

ILLUS – There’ll be plenty of time to serve. When we all get our mansions, I’ll be able to come round and mow your lawn. You can come to my place and clean my pool.

ILLUS – We’ll be able to study the word to our heart’s content. We’ll be able to read the original Greek

manuscripts. We'll have all the time in the world, if we want to study the Bible.

But who can tell me: what is the one Christian discipline that will never ever be possible to do again?

When we pass from this life into the next, never again will there be an opportunity to win a lost soul for Jesus.

And when an unbeliever passes from this life into the next, that's it.

They can never change their mind.

ILLUS – Imagine you've been in heaven 10,000 years. And you think, "I wonder how they're getting on down there in hell." And you have this conversation with a person in hell. And he says, "I've been here 10,000 years in absolute horror and torment. Tell me, when you were on earth, what were you doing to try and make sure that I wouldn't end up here?" "Well, we had such sweet fellowship." "But why didn't you do something?" "We had the best Bible studies, and worship, and prayer." "But why didn't you tell me? You knew and didn't tell me."

What if you were that person in hell? How would you feel?

The worst two words that will ever be uttered in hell are: If only.

And except for the fact that heaven is heaven and there will be no regret or pain, the worst two words that could ever be uttered in heaven would also be: If only.

If only I'd told them. If only I'd said something. If only I'd swallowed my pride, mustered my courage.

ILLUS – It's like we're on the beach – sunbaking, sipping our drinks, eating our chocolate biscuits, playing beach volleyball. And we look out into the water and there's this guy bobbing up and down, calling out: "Help me. I'm drowning." And among our group, there are different reactions. Some smile and wave and call out: "Hi, how ya doing? Isn't it a beautiful day?" Others get annoyed and say, "Isn't that shameful. If people are going to drown, why don't they drown somewhere else? There's a perfectly good beach down the road." Others say, "Look, I appreciate where you're coming from, but I'm busy right now." And the swimmer is desperately calling out, "Help me. I'm drowning."

You might think, "Surely that could never happen!"

But we've got to ask ourselves: Don't we do this?

People are drowning in life because they are victims of molestation or violence, suffering from drug addiction, sexual addictions, alcoholism, been through divorce, grief, broken homes, fatherless, widows, parenting problems, guilt, shame, low self-esteem, self-hatred, family dysfunction, insecurity.

And sometimes we say, "I'm sorry, I'm too busy."

Sometimes that's valid – we are limited, finite beings, and aren't always available.

But if we're always too busy, is the main thing really the main thing anymore?

Sometimes we judge them: "Isn't that terrible? Smoking, drinking, yelling at each other. Why don't they get their act together?"

Sometimes we simply ignore them and hope they'll go away, "Hi, how ya doing? Isn't it a beautiful day?"

And they're drowning in their sin and brokenness, and God's heart breaks for them.

Where are these people?

They're our neighbours, our workmates, our family, our fellow students, we pass them in the street as we go for walks, they are the staff and owners of the businesses we patronise.

Reaching these people is the main thing.

How valuable is a soul?

ILLUS – We have some friends who are quite wealthy. The husband runs a very successful business, owns a block of apartments, owns a commercial property, has other investments, a beautiful home. They love God and have four sons who they have prayed for every day of their lives. Each son, except one, is walking with

God. And when that son died from a drug overdose, his parents were devastated.

If God came to those parents and said, "I'm going to raise your son from the dead so that he can hear the gospel and become a Christian, but it'll cost you", how much do you think they'd be prepared to pay God?

Would they give their business? Their apartment block? Their commercial property? Their other investments? Their money? Their beautiful home?

You bet. They'd give everything.

Why would they give everything?

Because of the value of one soul.

If a soul is that valuable to a parent, how valuable is a soul to God?

Enough for Jesus to die. Does that tell you the value of one soul?

ILLUS – Let me illustrate this. I have a son who is an adult. And although I occasionally joke that we'd like to recoup some of the money we've spent on him by selling him on the black market, I can't think of any dollar value that would compensate for his loss. If someone said to me, "I'm sorry, but you have to sacrifice your son's life for a worthy cause", I can't think of anything in this world I would sacrifice my son for.

If I love my son that much, how much does God the Father love His Son?

But He sacrificed Him for us.

What value then has He placed on our souls that He was prepared to sacrifice His Son for us?

I have an ongoing ache in my heart, that we keep the main thing, the main thing.

ILLUS – Life is like a pie and we take the first bite, "That wasn't bad, but it was a bit tough". That was the work part of our life. Then we take another bit, "Mmm, that was so delicious." That was the leisure part of our life. Then another bite. And we don't remember what that part was like because that's the part of life that we slept through. Then there's the study part – that's a bit tough too. Our lives are so full, and so we get to the end of the pie and say, "That was a big pie, I'm so full." And God says, "Which part of that pie did you reserve for Me? Which part of your life is dedicated to doing what is most on My heart – saving lost souls?" And we look down at a plate with a few crumbs left on it.

Are we keeping the main thing, the main thing?

If winning lost souls for Jesus is the main thing that's on God's heart, how is it possible not to do it, and still "seek first the Kingdom of God"? (Matt 6:33)

How can we as a people of God seek first the Kingdom of God and never or rarely share the gospel?

How much of the three Ts am I devoting to the propagation of the gospel – my time, my treasure, my talents?

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Here's the challenge for you today: Are you willing right now to dedicate your life to the thing that is most on God's heart, and to keep the main thing the main thing?