

PRIORITY RESET



RESET

2023 SERMON SERIES

2023 Sermon Series

Priority Reset: for the Church and for You

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. (Eph. 5:15-16)



Priority management teaches us to distinguish between the urgent and the important. Some things are neither urgent nor vital, so we can dismiss them. Some things are urgent but not vital (such as searching the best fare for our next holiday before tickets are sold out), yet we often spend most of our time attending to them instead of the things that are both urgent and vital. But strangely enough, the things which we do not categorize as urgent but are vital should often be of the highest priority, such as pleasing God or having the presence of God in our midst; because only then can lives be transformed, can souls be saved, and can we truly live a life as God’s creation and people. This year we are going to learn to reset and focus our priorities on the vital – our relationship with God living as his people in his kingdom.

The 2023 theme – Priority Reset: for the Church and for You – will be framed by five books selected carefully from the Old and the New Testament, viz. Genesis (focusing on the life of Abraham)¹, the book of Psalms (selection), the book of Malachi, the gospel of Matthew (selection), and Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians. These texts cover the sweep of biblical covenant and salvation stories beginning with Abraham when God unilaterally covenanted with him in order to bless “all the families of the earth” (Gen. 12:1-3). The last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, then underscores Yahweh as the covenant-keeping God who expects the same of his people. Sadly, the Jews at the time were characterized by apathy and moral decline, having an outward religious appearance but not a living relationship with God. Against such background, the gospel of Matthew brings good news and depicts Jesus as the Son of God the messianic King of the Jews, who ushers in the kingdom of heaven to the here and now (Matt. 6:10). His people can now

¹ The series on the life of Abraham complements and continues the 2022 series on Genesis.

live in an unprecedented intimacy with God (hence Jesus' name as "Immanuel," Matt. 1:23) until Jesus returns. Before then, the apostle Paul was anxious to ground the young church in Thessalonica in the truths of the Christian faith, especially in relation to Christ's return such that their priorities would be set right amidst severe persecution and the uncertainties of the end times – a time of temptation to give in to discouragement and to compromise. Our approach this year, therefore, is to let the biblical books speak for themselves and challenge our priorities as a church and as individuals. Additionally, a selection of Psalms is inserted mid-way in the year to affirm that humanity's ultimate priority is to worship our God our Creator:

"Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." (Ps. 95:6-8)

Sermon Series: Priority reset: should I care?

Worship and spirituality are the essence of Christian life. After their return from exile from Babylon to Jerusalem, the Israelites rebuilt the temple and the city, and life soon settled down into a routine pattern of worship and religious formalities. But old habits die hard. Hidden under their superficial worship and formalities lies deep issues of doubts, apathy, negligence, arrogance and indulgence. What about us? Some of us might have been a Christian for quite some time, but have we likewise lost our zeal for the Lord, for his Word and his work? Have we slowly slipped into the slippery slope of spiritual superficiality and apathy? Has our faith gradually moved away from the center to the peripheries of life? Now is the time to reflect, rethink, reset, refocus and rebuild our spiritual and worship life.

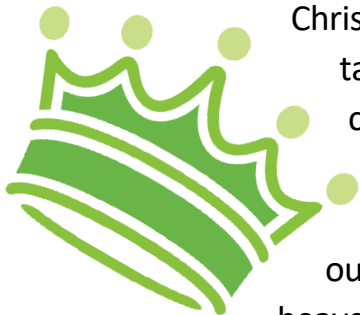


2023-01-01	Does God still love me – show it to me? *	Mal. 1:1-1:5
2023-01-08	Do I still love God – what have I offered to him?	Mal. 1:6-2:9
2023-01-15	<i>Special Sunday:</i> Joint anniversary service & vision casting	<i>to be specified by speaker</i>

2023-01-22	<i>Special Sunday:</i> Chinese new-year celebration	<i>to be specified by speaker</i>
2023-01-29	Do I still love her – the wife of my youth?	Mal. 2:10-16
2023-02-05	Why bother to care – if God doesn't seem to care?	Mal. 2:17-3:5
2023-02-12	Why bother to tithe – if I don't have enough?	Mal. 3:6-12
2023-02-19	Why bother to serve God – if it makes no difference?	Mal. 3:13-4:6

* Note: all these titles are tentative *for preachers' use only*; chairpersons should consult with the preacher in order to obtain the actual sermon title for the week.

Sermon Series: **Priority reset: the kingdom of heaven on earth**



Christians often think of “going” to heaven, but Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer towards the opposite direction. He taught us to pray, “your kingdom come, your will be done ‘on earth’ as it is in heaven.” We have too many misconceptions about the “kingdom of heaven.” The kingdom of heaven is not just a place to which we will ascend when we die. The kingdom of heaven is about the here and now. The kingdom of heaven should not only be a future tense, but also a present tense. Disciples should not wait for a distant future event, but go and live out the pattern of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven here and now, allowing the values of the kingdom of heaven to radically change the way we live on earth.

Jesus walked through the hills and villages of Galilee proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven is near! Repent (Matt. 4:17)! We should also repent of our superficial, lukewarm attitude to faith and take every teaching of Jesus seriously and strive to put it into practice. There are five major blocks of Jesus' teaching in Matthew's Gospel, corresponding to the Pentateuch of the Old Testament (the five books of Moses), to show that Jesus is more than Moses. If we take these teachings on the values of the Kingdom seriously and seek to put them into practice, we will find these teachings extremely radical and challenging. They will even bring us “troubles.”

But perhaps the challenge is good, because these teachings of Jesus are not meant for us to be comfortable and stay in the current status. Rather, they are meant to challenge us and inspire us to live out the values of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

So let the teaching of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel challenge us to live our faith. Let us put into practice the teachings of Jesus. Let us live out the values of the kingdom of heaven on earth, here and now, and let the kingdom of heaven come to us through our practice. May the will of the Father be done on earth, and in us, as it is in heaven.

2023-02-26	The calling *	Matt. 4:17-22
2023-03-05	The beatitudes	Matt. 5:1-16
2023-03-12	The law	Matt. 5:17-48
2023-03-19	<i>Special Sunday: Mother's day</i>	<i>to be specified by speaker</i>
2023-03-26	The righteous deeds	Matt. 6:1-18
2023-04-02	The treasure	Matt. 6:19-34
2023-04-09	<i>Special Sunday: Easter Sunday</i>	<i>to be specified by speaker</i>
2023-04-16	The generous Father	Matt. 7:1-12
2023-04-23	The two choices	Matt. 7:13-27
2023-04-30	The apostles	Matt. 10:1-42
2023-05-07	The seed	Matt. 13:1-23
2023-05-14	The parable of the kingdom of heaven	Matt. 13:24-52
2023-05-21	The little one	Matt. 18:1-20
2023-05-28	The forgiveness	Matt. 18:21-35
2023-06-04	The woes	Matt. 23:1-39
2023-06-11	The signs	Matt. 24:1-51
2023-06-18	<i>Special Sunday: Father's day (TNG Sunday)</i>	<i>to be specified by speaker</i>
2023-06-25	The ten virgins	Matt. 25:1-13

2023-07-02 The good and faithful servant

Matt. 25:14-30

2023-07-09 The commission

Matt. 28:16-20

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Sermon Series: Priority reset: how can I worship the Lord?

By understanding and recognizing the psalms in their different genres, we can learn to re-set our relationship with God under different circumstances, so that we can express our worship through poetry by pouring out our hearts to God, and thereby re-establish / re-build our relationship with God.



2023-07-16 Praise the King *

Ps. 96

2023-07-23 The joy of forgiveness of sins

Ps. 32

2023-07-30 Asking God for remembrance in lament

Ps. 137

2023-08-06 From sorrow to joy

Ps. 13

2023-08-13 What shall I return to the Lord?

Ps. 116

2023-08-20 Hope comes from the Lord

Ps. 62

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Sermon Series: **Abraham: Faith of our father, faithfulness of our Father**

Paul calls Abraham the father of all who are made righteous through faith. Abraham was not a perfect man nor a role model for good behaviour – the story of Genesis traces many sins and tragedies in his life and the life of his family. But God made an everlasting covenant with Abraham, and he believed. In this series, we will follow the story of this covenant and of faithful God who is true to his promises (and reflect on the priorities of our lives).

2023-08-27	Abram and Lot separate *	Gen. 13
2023-09-03	Abram rescues Lot	Gen. 14
2023-09-10	God's covenant with Abraham	Gen. 15
2023-09-17	The covenant of circumcision	Gen. 17
2023-09-24	The promise of a child (Mid-Autumn festival / evangelistic)	Gen. 18:1-15
2023-10-01	Sodom and Gomorrah	Gen. 18:16-19:38
2023-10-08	Sarah and the two kings	Gen. 12:10-20, 20:1-18
2023-10-15	Abraham tested	Gen. 21:1-7, 22:1-19
2023-10-22	Hagar and Ishmael	Gen. 16, 21:8-21
2023-10-29	The death of Sarah	Gen. 22:20-23:20

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Sermon Series: **Special Mission Series** (from 2023-11-5 to 2023-11-26)

Sermon Series: Priority reset: church in end times

Paul, Silas, and Timothy travelled to Thessalonica² to proclaim the coming of the Messiah at the Jewish synagogue in that city (Acts 17:3). A “great many of the devout Greeks” and “leading women” believed (Acts 17:4), but the Jewish leaders of the synagogue became jealous (Acts 17:3), and Paul and his companions were kicked out of the city. After a few months they could “bear it no longer” (1 Thess. 3:1), and Timothy was sent to Thessalonica to encourage the young church. Although the text is rather brief, Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians is one of the most positive, and the message spans “all tenses of salvation” – after he reminds the Thessalonians of how they turned from the past to the present, the apostle admonishes them to live *in the present for the future* when Christ will definitively return. The consummate reminder of Christ’s return, however, is not just a piece of information for the future, but to transform their lives in the present. We are very much in need of such advice in order to make “best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16). In view of Jesus’ return, what should the priorities of our church and our lives be?

2023-12-03	Priorities of church leaders *	1 Thess. 1:1-2:13
2023-12-10	Expectations for the church: take a stand	1 Thess. 2:14-3:13
2023-12-17	Straight talk about holiness	1 Thess. 4:1-12
2023-12-24	Straight talk about Jesus’ return	1 Thess. 4:13-5:11
2023-12-31	Straight talk about congregational conduct	1 Thess. 5:12-28

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² In Paul’s second missionary journey.