

GOD AND I

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Matthew 6:33.

Christ was continuing His consideration of the great danger that confronts the Christian of becoming overburdened with the things that belong to life in their world. He pointed out the danger of hoarding earthly possessions, and the danger of being worried about them.

Christ had before Him people who were worried about their daily bread. They did not know what tomorrow might bring. Hunger and cold were their next-door neighbors. Our Lord saw how this anxiety was occupying their thoughts, distracting their minds, corroding their hearts, and interfering with their service. He sought to turn their minds from these material things to something higher. Food and clothing, like peace and happiness, are by-products. They are secured by seeking something higher and better. We know that some commercial products are found only when men are seeking something else. They are called by-products, and sometimes they are the most valuable products of the industry or factory. This is true with many of the things which we seek in our lives. That happiness is a by-product is a fact which is often overlooked. Many seek happiness by pursuing pleasure or trying to achieve an ambition. They accumulate possessions, and then spend their time in devising means of enjoyment, but they fail to find happiness. It eludes them all the while. One day, they forget themselves and their happiness, and seek to help others. Then, happiness steals into their hearts. It is a by-product of seeking something higher and better.

Life is like a tangled bit of string. It only unravels when we take it by the right end. All around us are people with the strain of life in their faces, and anxiety reflected in their eyes. They are the victims of the struggles of life. The more they have strained the more they have become entangled in worry, and the more they are afraid of tomorrow. The tragedy is that they have taken hold of life at the wrong end.

One's views of life determine his way of living and control his behavior. "As a man thinks so he does." You can always tell what a man's philosophy of life is by the way in which he lives and by the way he reacts to the things that are happening around him.

Christ taught that the one secret of freedom from worry and anxiety is to seek first the rule of God and let Him take care of the rest. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." He is here suggesting a technique for the solution of our problems, which is the very opposite to our way of thinking and practising. He is saying that the first step toward getting what we need is a right relationship with God and His program. He is saying that the enthronement of God is the shortest possible route to the solution of every human problem. To those who refuse to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, the things that they need are denied to them rather than added to them. Unfortunately, the attitude of many is: "Seek ye first the kingdom of knowledge, or money, or recreation, or fashion, and religion can then be added if you happen to like that sort of thing." It is never right to try God only as a last resort.

Some are even embarrassed to talk about God and His kingdom in ordinary conversation. We: "Fear to own His cause"; we "Blush to speak His name." Perhaps some do this because it hurts their ego to admit that they cannot manage without Him. Perhaps it is because some are afraid that others of their crowd will think them peculiar. It is really amazing to what lengths some people will go to avoid seeming "religious." Because of this silly

complex, some take on only as much "religion" as is necessary for respectability. They purchase a Bible. They join a church, and they even attend worship services occasionally, but as for putting God and His righteousness first in their lives--well, they say one must not be a fanatic.

The art of living life well consists largely of knowing what to put the emphasis on. Some things are good enough in themselves, but become a definite hindrance when given an undue prominence in the life. There are some things in life that are primary, things which we must do; there are other things which are secondary, things which we may do, if we have time left after doing the things that are primary! And we must never confuse the relative value of things primary and secondary.

Man needs a partner. God says to him, "Come, I will be that partner. I have unlimited power. Link your life with Mine and together we will do great things." He says that to men in all walks of life. To the Christian God says, "Without me you can do nothing. Come unto Me--link your life with Mine, then the great spiritual tasks of the world will be accomplished, My name will be glorified, and you will be blessed and rewarded." Our task contains a mighty command and a marvelous promise. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." That is our part. "All these things shall be added unto you." That is God's part. You can see that you are to be God's partner. You are to put His interests first always and everywhere. Then God out of His bountiful storehouse will give you what you need. He tells you to walk in His way and then He will give you all that you need. He will keep His promise to you. Put Him and His interests first and He will supply your need. It is truly wonderful that the great God offers such a bargain to every Christian on earth.

I. The Precept.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God." The word which is translated "seek" is a strong one: it includes the idea of earnestness, eagerness, solicitude, intensity, and importunity. Putting God first takes faith, surrender, yieldedness, and courage. It involves our personalities, our possessions, and our plans.

1. Put God first in your living.

Keep your Christian profession before you all the time. Don't forget that you are a child of God. In order to be an effective Christian you must keep constant watch over self.

Christian living has two sides--the positive and the negative. There are some things that a Christian must not do, and some places he must not go. But just putting those things out of your life does not make you a strong Christian. You are not only to be godly but you are to be good. Christian separation has two aspects. It is a separation from the bad things, and a separation unto the good things. If you are going to put God first, you must say, "There are some things that I am not going to do, and some things that I am going to do." Then having taken a stand, you must stick to it.

Sometime ago in Pennsylvania about a hundred birds were found dead at the foot of the statue of William Penn. What caused their death? They were flying south and in the darkness they struck the statue. They were simply flying too low. That is the tragedy of so many lives today. Too many Christians are living on the low level. They are giving their lives to worldly things when they should be putting God first in every area of life. A worldly life is a spiritual calamity. If you love God,

you will yield your will to His will, surrender your means to His control, place your abilities under His supervision, commit your way to His care, and put Him first in your living.

"I surrender all, I surrender all,
All to Thee, my blessed Saviour,
I surrender all."

It is only as God is made the center of life that a life assumes its true purposes, imparts its deepest joys, and produces its greatest blessings.

2. Put God first in your loyalties.

Our first loyalty is to Christ, God's Son. No other person or thing in the world should come before Him. He put us first. He did not think of His own pleasure or comfort, but He thought of us. This cost Him His life, but He was loyal to us. As we consider the choices of life, we need to remember our loyalty to Christ. If you put Christ first in your life, you will always choose the highest and the best. Are you being loyal to Christ? When you go to the places He does not approve, when you say the things that you ought not to say, and when you do the things that do not please Him, and when you spend your money the wrong way, you certainly are not loyal to Christ. If you are loyal to Christ, you will have something of His spirit in you. It is well to ask the question, "What would He do under these same circumstances?" Then try to do what you know that He would do.

Are you loyal to His church? Some people attend church only occasionally. Some give a dollar after they have indulged themselves in everything else. Is that loyalty? Some never serve the Lord in and through the church. Is that loyalty? Some never invite anyone else to the church. Is that loyalty? You may be loyal to various other organizations, but your work in these and your gift to them will die. What you do for Christ and His church abides forever.

The best satisfactions of life are found in His church. A ship was sailing from the Orient with several cages of birds on board. Far out at sea, one of those birds escaped. In an ecstasy of delight this bird swept through the air. It was free. But in a few hours it landed back on the deck of the ship struggling from exhaustion. It had not found any place on the boundless deep to plant its feet, so it was glad to get back home. If you are a real Christian, you may leave the church and go out into the world, seeking delight for your soul in earthly things, but you will not find any satisfaction until you come back home to the church. You ought to be loyal to the church.

3. Put God first in your loving.

If you love Him, you will talk to Him through the exercise called prayer. You and I can go straight to His heart through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mr. Charles F. Kettering was the Chief Engineer of General Motors Corporation. In his day he was the greatest man in America in the field of mechanics. At a banquet a man looked at Mr. Kettering's large and strong hands, then he asked him the question, "Mr. Kettering, what is the most important thing that you ever did with these hands?"

Mr. Kettering replied, humbly, "The most important thing I ever did with these hands was to fold them in prayer to my Heavenly Father." Yes, if you love Christ and want to put Him first, you will pray.

Then, if you love Christ you will listen to Him. When your loved ones are away and you call them by long distance, you love to hear their voices. Now you can hear the voice of God if you read the Bible. The average Christian hears the Word of God only on Sunday morning as the preacher reads the scriptures. This is not enough. You ought to read the Bible for yourself daily and remember that God is talking to you.

Then, if you love Christ you will show it by your giving. We are to love in deeds, not simply in words. Perhaps you saw that double cartoon on one side of which a man was buying \$10 tickets to the show. He said to the ticket agent, "Give me the best in the house." On the other side he was sitting in the church. A songbook was in his hand and he was singing, "Oh, how I love Jesus!" At the same time he was dropping a nickel in the offering plate.

God's Word is specific in telling us that the tithe is to be the minimum that we are to bring into God's storehouse, to be used for God's work, to glorify Him, and to introduce souls to Christ. He says that when we do that He will open the windows of heaven and pour out the blessings on us. A great giver was once asked how he could give so much. He said, "I shovel out and God shovels in and God uses a bigger shovel than mine." You may say, "I can't afford to tithe." You can't afford not to. You will miss too many blessings.

God has a double purpose in commanding us to tithe. First, He wants others to know about His son Jesus Christ, how He died for them, and how He can save them from sin. God's other purpose in telling you to tithe is to develop you as a Christian. You and I may never give big sums, but if we are not having a vital part in the work of the church, we are missing one of life's highest satisfactions. I delight to have a part in the work of the Lord.

II. The Promise.

"All these things shall be added unto you." This promise is closely connected with the precept. Unless God's command is obeyed, the promise will not be fulfilled. He says, "All these things shall be added unto you." What things? Christ had just been talking about material things, so He says that, if we put Him first, He will give us all that we need, and He will keep his promise. Why not put Him to the test?

In all things our first duty and responsibility is to God. The Old Testament prophets were constantly stressing the law of divine priorities.

I wonder what the Shunamite woman thought when Elijah the prophet applied to her for room and board. She explained that her little store of food was almost gone; there was but a small quantity of meal in the bottom of the barrel and a little oil to mix with it. She was going to do a last baking for herself and her son, and then there would be nothing left, but Elijah, the man of God, said, "Make me a cake first." One could imagine her exclaiming, "What, make you a cake first! You, a stranger, when I and my son have so little left!" The answer might well have been, "Yes, it is a question of priorities; hereafter you are to run a boarding house for God. Put God first and He will look after your needs." So off she went and did as she was bidden and lo, she had more than enough as long as the famine lasted and the prophet remained as her guest. She gave God the first place and He in turn honored her faith and saw that she did not come to want. He will never be the debtor of any person. This is just a picture of what

of what He will do for all of us when we give Him the first place in our lives.

A certain man kept a lighthouse on a rugged coast. He had many ships and numerous lives in his keeping. On the first of each month an oil truck came and left him enough oil for that month. He was cautioned to guard his supply of oil carefully. Various individuals came and asked for some oil for different purposes. The man parceled out enough of the valuable oil that before the month ended the oil gave out, and the light in the lighthouse went out. That night three ships went down and scores of lives were lost. The next morning the government agent arrived, and the man began to apologize for letting the oil get away for good purposes. But the government man said sternly, "You were given one task--to keep the light burning. You used the oil for secondary purposes, therefore the ships went down and lives were lost. For this there is no excuse."

As Christians, we have one task above all others. We are to keep the light shining for Christ. We have just one light on earth, and we do not have the right to spend that light on the world and have nothing left for Christ and His church. So let us give our best to Christ and honor Him above everything else that we do. Doing so we shall be a blessing to others, and we shall receive the things that we need.