

SEEKING FIRST THE KINGDOM

Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister
 Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ
 of Latter Day Saints
 Independence, Missouri

Sunday, April 18, 1954
 8:30 a.m. KMBC and KFRM
 Kansas City, Missouri
 All Rights Reserved

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 6:24-33, Revised Standard Version.

No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon. Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why be anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat," or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you.

All of life is a constant succession of decisions as to what shall take priority, as to which comes first. Some of these decisions are quite incidental and insignificant. It doesn't matter in the least whether you put on the right shoe or the left shoe first when you are dressing. But a great deal hinges on some other decisions about priority. Which comes first, your home or your business? Both are important; neither one could exist without the other; but which is of primary and which is of secondary importance? If you are a married man, who comes first, your wife or your mother? If you are a church member, which comes first, church or state? Is it better to obey God, or man? Is it better to trust in God, or in man?

Some people muddle through most or all of their lives without ever making any clean-cut decisions as to what or who has first priority. They are forever vacillating and hesitating between two decisions, trying to decide each individual issue on the basis of expediency rather than principle, forever uncertain as to just where they stand or what they believe.

Jesus commands us to give supreme priority to the kingdom of God -- to seek first the kingdom. He says "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" He never even suggested that a man could divide his allegiance: Christ demands all or nothing. His kingdom is more important than family, or friends, or position, or wealth; it is even more important than life itself! Anything less than a complete and total devotion to the kingdom and to the King is fatal, is treasonable.

Every life must have some center, some one all important thing to which that life is devoted, and around which it revolves, some one thing which comes first. Every life must have a goal towards which it moves, for no man can face in two directions at once. No man can serve both God and Mammon. As Jesus used the term "serve" in this verse, it means not to serve for wages, but to serve as a slave -- a slave who is owned body

and soul by his Master, who loves that Master and who is devoted to him. A hired man can work part time for one employer, and part time for another, and give both of them good service; but no one can be the devoted slave of two men at the same time; for the slave owes all to his master; he is on duty or on call twenty-four hours out of the day and three hundred sixty-five days out of the year. No man can be slave to two masters.

Some people have the idea that those who would serve Jesus must give up everything for the sake of the kingdom. That is only partly true. Jesus' instruction is that we should seek first the kingdom, that we should give him and his kingdom first priority in our lives, that we should devote ourselves wholly and completely to it. If we comply with these restrictions, all other necessary and needful and desirable things will be added to us. Origen, one of the early church fathers, reports a saying of Jesus which is similar to, but not exactly like any saying recorded in the four gospels. It reads: "Seek the great things will be added to you; and seek the heavenly things, and the earthly things will be added to you." When Peter reminded Jesus that the disciples had left all to follow him, Jesus said, according to Luke: "There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting." Seeking the Kingdom first bring not loss, but gain.

If we seek results by wrong means, we fail. If we seek short term goals, but lose sight of the all-important goal, we are apt to find ourselves heading in the wrong direction. If we choose the kingdom of God as our goal, and if we diligently seek first that kingdom, all of our minor achievements will contribute to that goal. Even our minor failures will contribute to that goal; but in the long run we cannot fail, because we are working with God; we are working in harmony with his laws; we have access to his powers.

In the kingdom is to be found our only security. No life, no nation, no institution which is built on principles contrary to the laws of the kingdom -- laws which are inherent in every particle of matter and in every human mind and human body -- can hope to endure. The laws of the kingdom govern in every situation. To violate them is to court disaster. To obey them is to guarantee eventual success. Wealth laid up in an earthly Kingdom is never safe. Moth and rust corrupt, and thieves break through and steal. But wealth laid up in the kingdom of God is eternally safe, indestructible, imperishable.

In the third chapter of First Corinthians, Paul expresses this principle of seeking first things first in another allegory. Before one can build a building, he must have a safe foundation. Without a safe foundation, even the best of buildings will eventually crumble and fall. If a builder gets impatient to see what the finished product is going to look like, and starts building before he has laid the foundation, all his work will go for naught. But if he builds first the foundation, and then builds well thereupon, his work will endure. The foundation comes first!

Jesus Christ is the foundation which is laid -- the only sure foundation upon which any man may build his life. Our first task, our first obligation, is to seek this foundation, to find it, to claim it for our own, that we may have a safe foundation on which to build. That should have first priority in our lives. Seek ye first the kingdom of God. With the foundation assured, we may then start to build, taking care always to make the building worthy of the foundation on which it is laid, being always aware that the work which we build will some day be tried as by fire. If we have built of wood, hay, or stubble, the fire will burn it up; and we shall be left with nothing but the foundation; we may be saved, but without any reward for our life's work. If we build of imperishable gold which can survive the testing fires and which stands firmly on the foundation of Jesus Christ, then we shall have both salvation and reward.

Only in the kingdom of God is security. The rich man who built more barns for security lost all when death claimed him. The rich young ruler who thought more of his great possessions than he did of Jesus, lost all. Life is more than meat, and the body more than raiment. He who seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, will find in that kingdom friends who are dearer to him than wife or mother or father or child; he will find riches far greater than silver or gold or jewels or lands or houses. He who hath eternal life is rich; and he who seeks first the kingdom shall have all other things added to him.