

Seek first the Kingdom of God

Matthew 6:38 *"But seek ye first his kingdom and righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."*

B.B. Warfield

This verse sums up the primary teachings presented thus far in the Sermon on the Mount. The discourse commenced with a description of the groups who will experience joy and blessing as a result of the coming of the kingdom, highlighting other-worldliness as their leading characteristic.

The law requires holiness before God rather than outward righteousness. Starting at verse nineteen, Jesus encourages his listeners to focus less on worldly concerns and more on spiritual matters.

This conclusion is best summarised by the verse: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." It represents the core message of the entire sermon, contrasting the two main concerns that can distract us—the different pursuits that may occupy our attention. It does not advocate a passive life of indifference, like Buddhist withdrawal from desire and activity. Instead, it assumes that all people—and truly human—possess desire, energy, and activity aimed at a purpose. However, it differentiates between activities and their goals. We are to seek, but not the same as

the worldly pursuit of comfort, possessions, and advantages. Our focus should be on heavenly things, rejecting worldly seekings in favor of divine ones. Our primary goal is not material gain but spiritual fulfilment.

Looking more closely at the verse, we see that it protests against practical atheism. There is a formal atheism expressed through opinions, words, and reasoning, which claims there is no God and tries to persuade the mind of this falsehood. The Bible calls this outright foolishness: the fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' However, even when both the lips and the mind acknowledge God's existence and recognise that He governs the world and that we are accountable to Him in every thought, word, and deed, there can still be a form of practical atheism—living as if God does not exist.

Formal atheism explicitly denies the existence of God; meanwhile, practical atheism commits the even more astonishing sin of neglecting the very God it claims to believe in. Many individuals who would never outwardly say, "There is no God," still deny Him through their daily actions, acting as if He were absent. Additionally, among those who outwardly acknowledge and serve God, many still, in practice, deny that this God is the Lord over all the earth by their conduct.

We often limit the scope of where we truly allow God to operate. We sense His presence and activity in certain areas but not others; we seek His blessing in some situations but ignore it in others; we look for His guidance in specific matters but not universally. We trust Him in some crises and with certain hopes, yet not

consistently. This attitude is a form of practical atheism.

Our passage emphasises its opposition to such thinking, condemning the attitude of acting as if we are solely responsible for building our lives and fortunes without acknowledging God's role in anything.

How should we organize our lives? How do we support our families—or meet our own physical needs? Is it accurate to believe that we can entrust our eternal souls to God while doubting His ability to care for our temporary bodily needs? Since He has achieved salvation for us through the sacrifice of His Son, can we not also trust Him to provide food and clothing—things that are created simply by His spoken word? When we stand by the bedside of a dying friend, we can trust that God will guide them into eternity with confidence, but do we have the same

trust that He will sustain our friends once they enter the world?

Consider the practical atheism reflected in many of our earthly worries and concerns. Can we not learn from the birds and lilies, which our Father feeds and clothes? These lessons strongly rebuke our attitude that suggests we cannot trust God for our worldly needs and must wait until we've secured our fortunes before turning to Him. Many believe it's unreasonable to serve God wholeheartedly at the expense of their business pursuits, or to prioritise His service over their own provision. Some who have taken risks personally hesitate to entrust their families' well-being to God's care. The subtlety of these temptations is striking.

However, our Lord gently dismisses all doubts with the words, "Seek ye first the

kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Isn't this a rebuke to our tendency towards practical atheism?

However, the verse is not a rebuke but an appeal; it clearly urges us to prioritize God's kingdom and righteousness in our lives. Upon closer examination, we see that this appeal is not empty—it also contains a promise.

Our primary focus should be on God's kingdom and righteousness. By doing so, we will more reliably attain the earthly needs we have. The passage does not assume that these earthly things are unnecessary; rather, it emphasizes our need for them. It does not suggest that these things shouldn't be sought in their proper place and manner. Instead, it highlights the importance of how we seek them. We can seek them independently

of God, or we can seek them through and with God. It indicates that the first approach—the atheistic way, seeking to provide for ourselves—is ineffective, whereas seeking through and in God is the correct way to obtain them. Who could doubt this?

Firstly, we have God's Promise.

He assures us that if we seek His Kingdom and righteousness first, all these things will be added to us. Essentially, He promises that godliness grants both this world and the next. Many find this difficult to believe; it has been an ongoing challenge for the wise across generations, dating back to Job's time. Nonetheless, we hold onto the promise.

Despite life's hardships and confusion, it still makes sense to follow this reasoning: the best way to secure rewards is to serve the King. Since God is the King of all the

earth, serving Him wholeheartedly is the most effective way to gain earthly blessings. Although these blessings come as gifts rather than something we earn, it is still best for humans to seek them from Him. The King does not let His faithful servants go without.

More fundamentally, we can say that this is intrinsic to the nature of things. To truly enjoy the earthly goods God has provided for His children, the most effective approach is not to pursue them individually but to pursue them collectively. It is a social principle that improving the overall condition of society enhances our own enjoyment of material possessions.

A man finds a pot of gold. How will he enjoy it? His fellow tribesmen desire it, and no one can guarantee its safety for him. He risks being ambushed at night for

the treasure. Every bush conceals an enemy; a poisoned arrow can strike from any tree. His sleep is disturbed as he tries to keep his life safe. Hidden in the dark, he might bury his treasure under a large tree in the dense forest and vigilantly watch the area, fearing he's been watched and might lose it. Under such conditions, he doesn't truly enjoy the treasure—only the safety it provides.

Now, he has become a wise man, shifting his focus from protecting his treasure to civilising his people. From his tribe, the beginnings of a state emerge, and the authority of law appears—safeguarding the individuals and property of its citizens. This signifies a remarkable transformation. He no longer needs to hide his treasure; he can wear it openly. He can now enjoy possessing it. A higher stage is still possible: the community can become not only civilised but also

Christianized. Christian principles can replace external laws, and love can replace force. Inspired by the same spirit, he now uses his treasure to help those in need. He is truly enjoying it—not just protecting or owning it, but actively using it. When such a time fully arrives—what we call the Millennium—it signifies the coming of God's kingdom, the kingdom we pray for daily, when people no longer prey on each other but support and assist one another.

So, how should we approach this? According to the Lord's guidance—by seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness. As we pursue and implement this kingdom in our daily lives and close surroundings, it naturally follows that we will also acquire and enjoy the true riches of this world. There is a fundamental basis in the nature of things for our Lord's promise: "Seek ye first the

kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you." Could this be the most hopeful approach to gaining, maintaining, and delighting in these other blessings?

Second, the Motivation for Seeking the Kingdom of God

It is important to notice another key aspect of this appeal. On closer inspection, it becomes clear that it does not encourage us to seek God's kingdom and righteousness because they are the best way to gain other goods. The phrase is not "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" because—simply—"and"—all these things shall be added unto you. While godliness includes a promise of this life, that is not the reason we should pursue it.

It is a stronger reason because it offers the promise of eternal life. An even better

reason is that it pertains to Godliness. Our passage clearly emphasizes this, as it does not say "and all these things shall be your reward." It does not promise to compensate us for pursuing God's Kingdom and righteousness with earthly possessions. Instead, it states: "and all these things shall be added unto you."

The Greek term used is not for "pay" or "reward," but for a small, gratuitous addition to what is promised, akin to "in the bargain." The worldly possessions we receive should not be viewed as our reward, but as something "in the bargain." The core appeal of the passage rests elsewhere, specifically, in the contrast between earthly goods and heavenly goods. We should seek the heavenly not for the sake of the earthly, but for their own sake. As Paul notes, the Kingdom of God is ultimately about righteousness, not just material things.

This passage's main message is the 'lift' it offers. It emphasizes the highest good—God and His righteousness—fellowship with Him—and challenges us with the question: who would choose earthly food and drink over seeking God's kingdom and righteousness? Restoring harmony between man and God inherently includes every blessing. This is a cause worth sacrificing all earthly pleasures for.

This is something truly worth the effort of mankind; the ultimate purpose of our existence is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Should we not pursue it even if it means sacrificing all worldly possessions – if we can call losing less to gain more? We should seek this great reward, especially since, in addition, we will have "all these things added to us." Notice the tenderness of our Lord, who continually cares for our human frailty. Additionally,

another gentle word, when read correctly, reaches into our hearts to inspire us with another motive—encouraging us to seek God's kingdom and righteousness. The fact that this path is the best way to attain our necessary earthly blessings may itself be a compelling reason.

The pursuit of higher and more noble goals may be driven by a greater motive. Yet, there is an even more compelling one: love – love not for a principle, but for a person. Our Lord emphasizes this point. Properly understood, the passage reads: "Seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness," where "His" refers to "your heavenly Father." In this context, our Lord is reaching into our hearts. "For your heavenly Father knows that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first His kingdom and His—your heavenly Father's—righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Did we initially think the passage was a protest? Or a command? Now, we recognise it as more of a plea. Oh, the subtlety of love! Love is speaking to us here; won't it inspire us to respond? In response to such pleading, our only choice is to prioritise our heavenly Father's kingdom and righteousness. Since He is our Father, we are confident we will find these things—and, in comparison, how little they now seem!—along with whatever else we need, added unto us.

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