



Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 15

The Things of God First

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 5th October, 1986**

Text: *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6. 33).*

The emphasis is on the word *first*. “Seek ye *first*.” Beloved friends, if Christ is not first in our lives, He will not be second. We do need much heart-searching concerning our priorities, the things in our lives that really matter, the things that are more important than others. So there you have the emphasis, *first*. Like Mary, when she was found at Jesus’ feet, the Lord Jesus was first and other things did not matter. She had that truth burnt in her heart that the Lord Jesus spoke to Martha: “One thing is needful,” and she knew that there is only one thing that is needful, only one thing that really matters. Christ was first. So with that beautiful Scripture, “That in all things He might have the pre-eminence.”

“Seek ye first.” Now beloved friends, no sinner by nature ever did this. No sinner ever will. There are many, many things by nature that we seek: our ambitions, our own thoughts, our own pleasures, sinful or more refined, perhaps a name among other people, perhaps riches and wealth, perhaps prosperity. Now what is here written in the Word of God, when the new birth takes place, the Holy Ghost will write in your heart. “Seek ye first.” Because when the new birth takes place, divine things become more important than anything else.

Some of you perhaps this morning look back to your spiritual beginnings and perhaps at that time all kinds of important happenings were taking place in the country, but really you were oblivious to them. It was your sin and your soul and eternity, and nothing else really mattered. You were brought to walk out this pathway: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” before anything else, above all other things. And so if the Lord does begin to teach us and deal with us, then He will lead us in this pathway and all other things will have to come second, however important, however right. There will be this one thing that really matters. “Seek ye *first*,” and the Lord will give divine things the priority in our hearts and lives.

There is an urgency in this word, “Seek ye first,” an urgency in it. It is not just at the beginning of a work of grace: it is all along. It is the whole way through. God’s people, even the most favoured of them, need reminding of this. Now what are your priorities at present? “Seek ye first.” Are you putting the things of God first?

The Lord Jesus (for He of course is the Speaker, and never man spake like Him) introduces it with a “But.” “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” Why does He? Well, for two reasons. First of all, He has been speaking of the ungodly and what they seek. Always remember that in the New Testament when it speaks of the Gentiles, the meaning is not just those who were not Jews. The point is the world, the ungodly, and the Lord Jesus has been speaking of the things they seek after. He has not been speaking of wicked things; He has been speaking of lawful things. But the world is completely swallowed up with these earthly things. They may be lawful, but the world rises no higher. “God is not in all their thoughts.” There is no concern about their souls. There is no thought about eternity.

So the Lord Jesus is depicting the worldling, perhaps not living an immoral life, but completely swallowed up in earthly things. And then very solemnly the Lord Jesus says, “But ye, seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” O beware of being like the world, sitting in chapel every Lord’s day but not being any different from the world. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” Let me affectionately ask you, have you been doing it this week? Have you been swallowed up, immersed, in earthly things – perhaps lawful things, your home and your family and your business? Or has there been something beyond this?

“The one thing needful, dearest Lord,
Is to be one with Thee.”

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness” – whatever the world seeks, whatever your friends seek, whatever the rest of your family seek, whatever professors of religion seek. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” Let me just linger a little time on this point of being swallowed up, immersed, in every day things. The great majority who are lost eternally do not perish because of some gross act of wickedness like murder or adultery. The great majority perish

because they are completely satisfied with earthly things, completely swallowed up with them, things that in themselves are right: making a living, eating and drinking, fulfilling ambitions and so on.

Of course, this is what the Lord Jesus spoke so solemnly of in another place. He said, “As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.” What is wrong in eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage? Surely in the days of Noah getting married was a good thing. But the point was this. They did not need these appalling wickednesses to damn them. It was enough just to be swallowed up in earthly things, to go on the same day after day until eternity swallowed them up instead. “They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” In another place, the Lord Jesus not only said they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, but He also said they were “buying and selling, building and planting.” What is wrong with buying and selling, building and planting? Many of them were builders; many of them were farmers. Is there anything wrong in that? They were completely swallowed up in it. Are you being swallowed up in lawful things, in needful things, in necessary things? You are completely immersed in them. They are pressing the things of God out. “Until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” What about all these houses they had built and all those fields they had planted and all the things they had bought and sold, and all the wives and husbands they had married and all the food they had eaten and drunk? What did they matter when the flood came and carried them all away?

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” Now that is the first reason why the Lord Jesus prefaced it by a “but,” in contrast to the world who seek nothing higher than every-day things. Now the second reason is this. The Lord Jesus is warning against undue worry. His application of the text is this: “Take therefore no thought for the morrow.” Now, of course, He does not mean by that that we must not be prudent in making plans. Of course we have to make plans. “Take

therefore no thought.” Do not be over-anxious. Do not be unduly anxious. Leave things with Me. Commit them into My hand. Leave them there. “Take therefore no thought for the morrow.” The Lord Jesus has been speaking about being over-anxious about what will be tomorrow or what will be during the coming weeks. How can I manage? and will I be able to afford this? or will my health be all right? Will there be sufficient strength? How will we be able to get through? What if something else is taken away? This anxiety! So the Lord Jesus outlines all these anxieties and He rebukes them. He says that this is the spirit of the world, just as much as being immersed in every-day things.

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” “Take therefore no thought for the morrow.” Some of us are plagued with this undue anxiety. With some of us it is a besetting sin, a sinful weakness. But the Lord here rebukes that just as much as He rebukes worldliness. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God” – leave all these other things – “and all these things shall be added unto you.” But what a kind word He adds to this rebuke! Those of you who are concerned about tomorrow and next week and the unknown way, do you know what He says? “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” In other words, God in heaven is your Father, your heavenly Father, and He knows. Some of you here have had to rest on that many a time in your trials. You have had to go and say, “Lord, Thou knowest.” “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” And the implication is that all these things will be richly supplied.

“Your heavenly Father ever lives,
And all His choicest treasure gives
To you, the favourites of His heart,
Nor will He ever with you part.”

“Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” “But seek ye first.” “Take therefore no thought for the morrow.” “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

So we need to beware of this undue anxiety. O for the spirit of Ruth! She had these things she was worried about, her poverty, the lost

inheritance. She had gleaned in Boaz' field and gained encouragements. But there was still the great concern, the lost inheritance. In other words, she had things that were lying heavily upon her. What did she do? Encouraged by godly Naomi, with the Word of God on her side, she went in softly by night to Boaz' feet and she left her burden there. Now sinner, have you ever gone in softly by night to Jesus' feet, with your burden about tomorrow or the unknown way? Can you, dare you, go in softly to His feet and lay your burden down there and then seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Not put your burden at Boaz' feet and then find that you have taken it back with you. What is the attitude of soul concerning the unknown way, these burdens that you have left at the Lord's feet? What was it with Ruth? What is it to be with you? This: "Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall." Leave everything completely in His hands. "For the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day." "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness" – not being immersed in the world on the one hand, and not being swallowed up with anxiety about the unknown way on the other hand.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness." Now let us look at this word more closely. What does the Lord Jesus really mean when He bids us seek first His kingdom, or as He calls it here, the kingdom of God? Well, He means the kingdom of grace here on earth and the kingdom of glory hereafter. The kingdom of God. Now there are two or three very important things for us here.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God." Taking the kingdom of God as the kingdom of glory hereafter, taking the kingdom of God as meaning heaven, that eternal inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, reserved in heaven for His people, taking it first of all as meaning that. Now "seek ye first the kingdom of God."

"Eternity, tremendous sound!
To guilty souls a dreadful wound;
But O, if Christ and heaven be mine,
How sweet the accents, how divine!"

Then "seek ye first the kingdom of God." O if you died tonight, would you go to heaven? Have you got sufficient urgency in your religion? Is it the one thing that matters, your sin, your soul, eternity, the great judgment

day when you must meet your Maker? For it is appointed. O to give diligence to make your calling and election sure. Strive to enter in at the strait gate. “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” “Seek ye first.” May this be the vital point above other points: Am I prepared for heaven? Am I ready, that when I die heaven will be my eternal portion through the shed blood and merits of the Lord Jesus? Now seek this first. O may it be the one thing that matters, to be prepared for heaven, that heaven might be yours when you die.

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God.” Another thing it means is this. The things of God here on earth – always put them first. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God.” God is setting up the kingdom of His grace in this world. He is doing it in answer to the prayers of His people. He is doing it by the power of the Holy Ghost. He is doing it through the preaching of His Word. All these spiritual things are the things of the kingdom of God. Now always put them first. If it is a choice between your family and the things of God, put the things of God first. If it is a choice between your comfort and the things of God, put the things of God first.

I think I have mentioned over the years: when I was at university at one time I was connected with a few Christian brethren and there was one man at their meeting who was their secretary. I think the term they used was “corresponding brother.” Now as a boy, an outsider, there never seemed much to me in this man. He did not seem to have any special gifts, and I do not know whether he ever spoke to me. Yet he seemed to be honoured, and one of the elders there, with whom I was living at the time, said, “That man has always put the things of God first, whatever the cost, whatever the sacrifice.” I thought what a witness to be borne of any man! He did not seem much of a man to look at or in his prayers or in anything he did, but this was the witness his friends bore concerning him, that throughout his life he had always put the things of God first. These are the ones we need in our churches. Where are these men, these women, these boys, these girls, who count not their lives dear, who are willing to put the things of God first, who are willing to go the second mile for Jesus’ sake?

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God.” Another meaning of it is this. They were asking Jesus about the kingdom of God. “The kingdom of God is within you.” In other words, the setting up of God’s kingdom in this world is that inward, secret, spiritual work of God the Holy Ghost in

your heart and conscience. Well, seek this first, the health, the prosperity of your soul. The beloved apostle wrote to Gaius and he said, “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” (He had a sickly body and a healthy soul.) One old preacher said that if you wished most people that, you would almost kill them. O put the health of your soul first. There are two natures. There is the old nature and the new, and the old nature will always be crying out after sinful things, worldly things, carnal things. Starve it. And your new nature will be crying out after godly things. Feed it. It is a solemn thing if in your life and your home and your behaviour you are seeking to satisfy the cravings of your carnal heart. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God” – the health and prosperity of your soul. Seek ye first that there might be a good work of grace that only God can begin and only God Himself can carry on and complete. Be more concerned about a vital, experimental knowledge of the Son of God than anything else, because nothing else will do.

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God,” seek that your priorities are right. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, *and His righteousness.*” Why does the Lord Jesus add those three words, “and His righteousness”? Well, because there are two things here that cannot be separated. If you are not seeking His righteousness, then you are not seeking first the kingdom of God. “And His righteousness.” How many of you are seeking, earnestly seeking, an interest in the righteousness of Christ? Is it an attractive theme to you? It is to God’s people, that wonderful, spotless-white wedding garment of Christ’s righteousness that He puts on His people. There they are, in their sin, guilt and shame, confessing it, renouncing their own righteousness, and the Lord in love and mercy takes away their old covenant of works righteousness in all its defilement. His precious blood cleanses them from all their sin and then He completely covers them in the glorious robe of Christ’s righteousness. In it they stand complete, “not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” And God looks on them and says, “Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee.” This is the righteousness, the glorious righteousness of Christ.

Now tell me, are you seeking after Christ’s righteousness? Like the apostle, “That I may ... be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” The vital point is to renounce

our own righteousness and to be found complete in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus. Now seek this first, beloved friends. Seek it above everything else. It is the vital point. It is the vital theme, that wonderful robe of Christ's righteousness, to be covered in it, to be clothed in it.

“No age can change its glorious hue;
The robe of Christ is ever new.”

“And His righteousness.” Then if you are seeking to be clothed in the robe of Christ's righteousness, you will also be seeking to be led in the paths of righteousness. You will not want the way of the world. You will not seek after the way of the flesh. You will want the good Shepherd to take you by the hand and to lead you in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

“And all these things shall be added unto you.” Now that means two things. It means first of all that your seeking will not be in vain. They that seek shall find. None ever yet earnestly sought the kingdom of God and His righteousness and failed to find it. The Lord never yet said to the seed of Jacob, “Seek ye Me in vain.” It is a wonderful promise to seeking, longing souls, that as you seek, so you shall find.

“And all these things shall be added unto you.” Secondly, it means this, that even in your day-by-day life, even in providence, all these things shall be added unto you. That does not mean, of course, that everything your carnal heart would like, you shall have. It does not mean that all your ambitions will be satisfied. It does not mean that your business will always prosper. But everything you truly need as you journey from earth to heaven, whatever you truly need, you shall, you must have. Why? “For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”

Then “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” It is a special word to young people setting out in life. At the beginning of your life, as you grow up, what is it that you are seeking first? O, through mercy, may the things of God be first. The Lord Jesus says, “I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me early shall find Me.” There is something very precious concerning the fruits of the Spirit of God in girls and boys.

“Seek ye first” – at the beginning of your life. “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.” “Seek

ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” O may the things of God ever be first. May your priorities be right. May the Holy Ghost teach you to approve the things that are excellent. There are two things: that you might try the things that differ, and that you might approve the things that are excellent.

It is a word for aged ones coming right down to the swellings of Jordan. Time cannot be long. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” It is awfully solemn when you find aged people and they are so bothered about their money and things here on earth and there is eternity before them. Another step and they will be in the grave. In a right sense they can say what David said wrongly: “There is but a step between me and death.” O you aged ones (and how we are all growing older!), “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” Sadly with so many aged people today, their last days are not their best days. Like King Asa; he was a godly man, but when he was old he “sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians.” He seemed to become obsessed with his afflictions. He had ill health. He was in pain and he was completely obsessed with it.

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. In other words, leave all these things in the hands of God.

“Make but His service your delight,
Your wants shall be His care.”

And then what about those who are not really young or old? Well, there are so many responsibilities, aren't there? Some of you have so many things in your business. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” Some of you have so many things in your families. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” It is an important word. It is a vital word. May the things of God ever be first. May Christ ever be first. You wake up in the morning. What is really concerning you? Is it, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God”? And how do you start the day? Is it asking God's blessing? “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” What about these plans you are making? What about these decisions you have to take? What about this move in life you are contemplating? Is it this: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness”? If you cannot seek Him first, then you cannot do it. “If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.” Our carnal religious

hearts like to do something like this. We plan something, we start it, and then feeling very holy we say we cannot manage without the Lord, and we ask the Lord to go along with us in what we are doing. Beloved, if the Lord is not with us at the start, He will not come in half way through.

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” In a word, like the apostle, “This one thing I do.” You say, “Paul, there are ten thousand things.” “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” You remember how Baruch was turned aside once with his ambitions, and the Lord said, “Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not.”

“This one thing I do.” The comparison is to a race. That man, that boy in a race, he may have all kinds of things, but when he is running the race, there is only one thing that matters and that is that he should reach the goal, and that he should reach that goal honourably, reach his goal first. All these other things are being left on one side. And what does he carry? What does he wear? As little as he can. “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.” Sin – you have got to lay that aside. Weights – you cannot really say they are wrong, but they do not really help you in your Christian life, in the heavenly way. “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.” It is to keep your eyes on Jesus fixed. It is to seek Him first. It is “one thing I do.” May you know that spirit,

“Life with its path before thee lies;
Christ is the way, and Christ the prize.”

I understand that in a race in New Testament days there was not a finishing post or a tape at the end. There was a man who stood there. He was at the end of the race, and it was the first person who could reach that man; so as they ran, they looked forward and kept their eyes on that man at the end of the race. That is it, beloved friends. There is a Man at the end, a Man in heaven whom we love and who we trust loves us, and He is standing there, waiting to receive His people when they have finished their course. It is to have your eyes fixed on Him, looking unto Jesus. It is “this one thing I do.” It is seeking first. “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press

toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”
“Looking unto Jesus.” “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His
righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”