

Articles and Sermons :: The Great Business Of Life -finney

The Great Business Of Life -finney - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2006/12/9 12:41

The Great Business Of Life

by Charles G. Finney

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

Introduction

What does the Kingdom of God and His righteousness mean? I remark first that this kingdom is not an outward and visible kingdom. As Jesus said, the true kingdom of God "cometh not with observation" (Luke 17:20). It is a spiritual kingdom set up in the hearts of His people. It consists in the establishment of His own dominion in their hearts. "The kingdom of God is within you," but this kingdom is expressed on earth by an outward and visible Church (Luke 17:21). Yet, the kingdom here intended is not a visible church, but an internal and spiritual kingdom.

By "the righteousness of God," we understand these two things: first, the method by which He pardons and justifies us, and second, the way in which He makes us personally holy. Faith in Jesus Christ is God's method of justifying us and bringing us into a state of acceptance with himself. Faith in Jesus Christ is God's method of making us personally holy. Faith in Jesus Christ works by love; and this faith, by its very nature, purifies the heart.

The injunction "seek ye first" means at least three things. First, seeking God's kingdom and righteousness must be our first business in point of time: we must allow nothing else to take precedence before it. Second, we must regard nothing as of greater importance, or of equal importance, than seeking God's kingdom. Third, "seek ye first" implies that Christianity is to be the great business of our future life. The Christian faith is always to be considered as of the first importance to be attended to, and to be the first concern of life.

God's Kingdom Must Be Sought First

Until we seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, nothing else we do can be acceptable to God. As long as we neglect this great salvation, as long as we have not secured our justification by faith in Christ, as long as we are not interested in the kingdom of God by actually embracing it and receiving its laws into our heart, we can do nothing acceptable to God. Until we have done this, we cannot fulfill any requirement of God and He cannot accept anything else we do--for "whatever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). Whatever does not imply faith in us is sin; therefore, if we neglect salvation in Christ as of primary importance, nothing that we do can be acceptable to God.

People may have all the outward forms of morality and goodness, but if they have neglected the kingdom of God and His righteousness, whatever else they do, God will not accept them. He will not and cannot accept us if we are putting last what He has put first, and that first which He has put last. God requires us to put this first, and if we do not put things in the order which He has commanded, if we do not make this the great business of life, the first business of our lives, nothing else that we do is acceptable to God.

Since seeking His righteousness is the most important business to us, it should claim our first attention. What can compare with its importance to us as individuals? If we secure an interest in the kingdom of God, if we become subjects of His government, whatever else we fail to secure is unimportant. Whatever else we fail to secure we shall hardly regret in the future. But if we do not secure this, whatever else we secure will only increase our responsibility and our guilt. People ought to understand this: nothing is of any real importance to us unless it is connected with God's kingdom, and shall enable us to obey more effectually His command.

Now, if we regard anything as more important than our relationship with God in His kingdom, we entirely pervert things. God's kingdom is most important to ourselves and to our families; most important to all who stand in any relation to us and have any claims upon us. Who does not understand and believe this?

Suppose a man neglects God and Christianity for the sake of his family. Does he thereby really benefit his family? No indeed! The real and best interests of his family require that he should pay his first and chief attention to this great requirement of God. Who can doubt this? No man really and truly benefitted his family by neglecting to obey God. Such a thing never was and never can be. By neglecting to put Christ first and make Christian faith his first duty, who can tell how much the family may have to suffer from his negligence?

Putting God's kingdom first is most important to a person's creditors. If a man disobeys God, His curse is upon him, and upon all that he does and has. But if he obeys God, he may expect a blessing upon his business; and if a man endeavors to please God, he is sure to be an honest man. If a man owes me money, and that man tries to obey and please God, I have reason to believe that he will be enabled to pay me sooner than if he did not regard the commands of God at all. Therefore, even if I were a selfish man, I should say to my debtor, "Whatever else you do, don't neglect to obey God--don't neglect your duty to Him."

Putting God's righteousness first is important to our neighbors, friends, connections, the world at large, the Church of God, and all with whom we are surrounded. We should not neglect to regard the kingdom of God as the first, great, and principal business of our life. Who can doubt this? No person can doubt it, who believes in the reality of the Christian faith! No person can doubt it, who believes that God governs the world!

It is extremely dangerous to neglect this business and concern. It is more dangerous to neglect this than anything else. Why, suppose we did neglect everything else, what then? Why, it would be an evil in some sense, but, in comparison, it would be no evil at all. Who does not believe that it is infinitely dangerous for a man to neglect his eternal salvation? And if he does not assign this the first place, he may never attend to it at all. He is in danger every moment of dying or being given up by the Spirit of Christ! Why, there is nothing so dangerous in the universe as for a person to put commitment to Jesus Christ off or not to put it first. Suppose he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul, of what value would the whole world be to him? All other dangers are as nothing in comparison with this!

Failing to put Christ first is not only most dangerous to ourselves, but so far as we sustain relations to anybody else, it is most dangerous to them. If we neglect this great business, if we neglect to make the kingdom of God our great principal business, just so far do we jeopardize their souls, as well as our own, and often bring down upon them the curse of God as the result of our neglect. Who does not know that this is true?

If we will neglect the kingdom of God and His righteousness, we must inevitably lose our souls. "How shall we escape," says the apostle, "if we neglect so great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3). People need not take great pains to ruin themselves. If they neglect to lay hold on the salvation that God has provided for them, their ruin is inevitable. Let them be good wives, good husbands, good parents, good children, good citizens, say prayers, go to meeting, and give money to send the Gospel to the heathen. Let them do anything else in the world but what God requires as of first importance, and they are sure to lose their souls.

People make a great mistake on this subject, or else the Bible is not true. They make a great mistake on this subject, or else our own natures contradict us. Our own natures affirm that sin is an evil from which we ought to escape; that we should make salvation from sin the most earnest and solemn business of our lives. And the Bible tells us to run for our lives, to "so run that ye may obtain," to "so fight that ye may obtain," to "gird up your loins," to address yourselves to it as if you were about to make it the great, present, and perpetual business of life.

Now, do not believe me censorious if I tell you that the great mass of those who claim to be Christians are not making this the great business of their lives! It seems as if they attended to it just enough to entertain a hope that they shall be saved, but they never attend to it in such a sense as to manifest much solemn earnestness about it. The fact is, such people know nothing at all of Jesus Christ, and the natural result will be that they will lose their souls! They never get rid of their sins, they never become sanctified, and therefore, they are not fit for heaven. Really, many persons seem to suppose that they can live in sin till death, and then all at once they will become sanctified and prepared for heaven. Now, we never read in the Bible that death will sanctify us, or that we will go to heaven if we are not sanctified in this world by the renewing of the Holy Spirit through our belief in the Gospel.

Many who claim to have gospel faith, "the kingdom of God and His righteousness," understand it very little. They regard the righteousness of God as imputed, not imparted, righteousness. They imagine that somehow or other the righteousness of Christ can be accounted to them without their being personally holy. They do not come into sympathy with God. They neglect to have this kingdom of God set up within them. God's government has no dominion over them. How, then, do they expect to get to heaven? What can they understand by the kingdom of God and His righteousness; which they a

re required to make it the business of their lives to seek?

It would be better to leave everything else undone than to leave this undone. How memorable and decisive are Christ's teachings in this respect. He will not allow us to give ourselves any anxiety on other subjects. Nothing is to take precedence over this. When one said to him, "Let me first go and bury my father," he said to him, "Let the dead bury their dead" (Matthew 8:22). Your own father, and the duties you owe to him in that relation, must not stand in the way of your seeking eternal life. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness:" nothing should be allowed to have precedence over this!

God's Kingdom Must Be Sought Now

The present is the only sure time that we have; therefore, we ought now to make this our immediate and first concern. The Bible always says now, "Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7). You may die, or if you do not die, you may be given up of the Holy Spirit!

Every moment's delay makes the matter worse! Every moment's delay increases your sins, increases the hardness of your heart, and the probability that you will be lost. If you continue to reject the great salvation that is offered, you may soon come into such a state that the truth will cease to affect your minds and hearts at all; your conscience will become "seared as with a hot iron," and your words will constantly be, whenever the truth is spoken, "When I have a more convenient season I will call for thee." It is almost certain that that season will never come, because the longer you delay, the more hardened you must of necessity become. If you are not ready now to make this the great business of your life, the probabilities are that you will lose your soul!

Let me say, procrastination is a great evil. Perhaps more souls have been lost by this form of iniquity than by any other. The devil is constantly suggesting reasons for delay--reasons why you should not obey God and give up your whole mind to Him. The ordinary policy of Satan is not to try to make infidels of you: he suggests that the present is not the time to attend to your souls--remember that if you listen to his suggestions, procrastinate, and put off concern for your soul, you may be lost and are almost sure to be.

Unrepentant persons, and even religious persons, are constantly in danger from the fact that there are so few in solemn earnest on this subject. They are in great danger of not feeling the unspeakable necessity of a present and solemn earnestness in seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness. With respect to those who claim to be Christians, unless you make the kingdom of God the great business of your life, you are the great cause of stumbling to those around you. You are misleading them in the most effectual manner. You are saying by your works, "There is no need to make this the great and solemn business of your life. There is no necessity to be particularly anxious about your soul."

When you consent to postpone anything till tomorrow, it will never be attended to effectually, and will be continually misleading to those around you. I suppose you intend sometime to make this the most serious business of your life. Let it, then, be your first business from this time forth, or you may lose your soul.

I have known many cases where people have come to see clearly that they were likely to lose their souls unless they began immediately to obey God by seeking His kingdom first. In revivals of religion, I have seen many instances where persons have come to feel that if they procrastinated any further they must lose their souls and have resolved that nothing should hinder them, that nothing should engross their attention or stand in the way of giving their whole mind up to attend to it. I could tell multitudes of facts where people became conscious of this, when the providence of God aroused them from their sleepy state and arrested their attention. In such cases, they have made up their minds that nothing should, by any means, stand in their way--nothing should by any means be allowed to hinder them from making faith in Jesus Christ the great business of life. I shall mention one fact.

A lawyer, a man of large business in his profession, had been awakened in a revival. He went to his office with a resolution to attend to his soul at the risk of neglecting everything else. When he reached his office, some individuals, to whom he had promised his assistance, called upon him for important business. "Gentlemen," said he, "I cannot attend to your business now, I must first attend to my soul. I have neglected this business so long already that if I allow myself to neglect it any longer, I shall lose my soul to all eternity. Will you excuse me for the present, or get someone else to attend to your business?" They left the office and took the papers with them. He stayed alone in the office, resolving that he would not leave till he had given his heart to God. And the fact is, that he did give his heart to God and found peace.

My dear reader, what an awful game you have been playing with yourself, if you have been neglecting the business which God sent you into this world to attend to. He made it your great, solemn, and only business. Have you neglected it? I say that the care of your soul is your only business, to which all other things are only helps. And are you attending to this great business, or are you neglecting it and thus on the road to ruin? God is speaking to you by His Word, by His Spirit, and by His ministers, saying, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." This is the errand upon which God has sent you into the world, and have you allowed yourself to neglect it? Have you been wandering about and forgetting the errand on which you were sent? Did your Father commit a soul to you, and tell you to take care of it? And are you running about thinking of everything but taking care of it and by so doing disobeying your Father and ruining yourselves? Now, is it not true that you have been acting thus foolishly and wickedly? Oh, think of your guilt in neglecting your soul and disobeying God and resolve now to procrastinate no longer!

For a person to act thus on any other subject, he would be pronounced insane. And it is moral insanity which makes people neglect the business of their eternal salvation: it is madness in the heart. Suppose a man should neglect the most important part of his worldly business, the neglect of which would ruin all his worldly prospects, why everybody would say he was insane. Who can doubt this? Now, what higher evidence can a person give of insanity if he admits his guilt and danger in words and yet systematically neglects to save himself from ruin by his actions? If a person should deny the whole matter and say there was no truth in the statement, "that he is in danger by his neglect," what higher evidence could he give of being insane? Let anyone tell if he can!

The Meaning of The Promise

We must now seriously consider the meaning of the promise: "And all these things shall be added unto you." Observe in the connection of our text, Jesus Christ is speaking of worldly things. He tells us not to give any anxiety about these things at all, but to let our anxieties be respecting the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Then, all these worldly things of which He is speaking shall be added unto us. The word, "added" here means thrown in, something super-added. Now, Christ says: it is perfectly unnecessary that we should be anxious about worldly things, because, if we seek first "the kingdom of God and His righteousness," He will see that we are fully supplied with what we need in relation to our bodies. Let the great business of our lives be spiritual concerns, and He will take care that we shall not want in relation to temporal matters. The promise is, that if we give our supreme attention to spiritual matters, our temporal needs will be supplied.

From what has been said, it is plain that we can all very well afford to obey God in this respect; for, He will take care of our temporal wants, if we will only pay supreme attention to our souls. We can very well afford to obey God thoroughly. You see, He has not placed us in such a position that we must starve to death if we seek the salvation of our souls, that our families must starve or our fellow-creatures must suffer or that the ruin of our temporal concerns must necessarily be the result of our determination to attend to the cause of Christ. How infinitely kind of God to give us the assurance that He will take this stumbling-block out of our way, if we will but attend first to the salvation of our souls, and make faith in Jesus Christ and the glory of God the objects of our supreme regard. He very kindly says, "If you will take care of your souls, I will take care of your bodies. You have an immortal soul to be saved, let My kingdom be set up in your hearts, seek your own salvation, work it out with fear and trembling, and don't be anxious about your body, for I will take care of that."

I have become acquainted with many interesting facts that illustrate the care of God for the temporal interests of His devoted servants--those who came right up to obeying the requirement. I have known, too, many instances in which persons have said that they could not attend to the cause of Christ without ruining their worldly prospects. A barber, who had been in the habit of cutting hair on the Sabbath day, became awakened, and began to reflect upon his sins, and felt the importance of attending to his soul. He was in a difficulty. Many of his customers were ungodly men, who always came for haircuts on a Sunday. He did not see, therefore, how he could close his shop on that day. Yet, how could he be a Christian and not close on the Sabbath? He spoke to his customers, and the great mass of them said, "If you shut up your shop on the Sabbath, we must employ someone else." However, he made up his mind to starve to death rather than disobey God. He resolved to tell his customers that his shop would in the future be closed on Sunday. When he had fully resolved upon this, some of them asked if he would cut their hair on Saturday night. "Oh! yes, till midnight," he replied. And this he did. He cut hair till midnight on Saturday, but resolutely closed on the Sabbath. I saw him some years later, and I asked him, "How do you get along?" "Why sir," he replied, "my business has been better than ever; a great deal better." This is only one of many similar instances that I could mention, where individuals have supposed that they were about to sacrifice everything by becoming Christians, but, on the contrary, have received much benefit, receiving a hundred fold more in this present life, and the promise of the life everlasting.

Proper attention to business is really attention to following Jesus Christ. If you make your business God's business, transact it on right principles, and get your heart into a right state, so that you do everything from Christian motives, why, your business is then as much a part of the kingdom of God as praying and going to church.

God's promise here is designed to leave people entirely without excuse for neglecting to attend to their eternal salvation. Many reverse God's order in point of time, and instead of putting loyalty to Christ first, put it last. The first place is given to the world, the attention is wholly given up to the pursuit of wealth. Those persons want to place themselves in a position to be independent of God. They must get a fortune first, and then attend to Christ and His cause.

And then there are many persons who not only reverse God's order in point of time, but there are multitudes who reverse God's order in point of the importance of it. How remarkable that many persons should think themselves religious people, while they really place more practical stress upon the most trifling things around them than upon the great questions of salvation and disobeying God. Instead of making their Christian faith the greatest and most important practical business, they make it the least important. The persons I am speaking of do not utterly neglect it, but they so attend to it that everybody knows that they care very little about it, and do not rest upon it. Those who do not make the kingdom of God their great business, tempt God. Multitudes of souls are lost by tempting God in this way. They are living worldly, selfish, and ungodly lives, and yet they try to make themselves believe and the world believe that they are going to heaven in spite of what God has said to the contrary. They live in disobedience to God, but profess to be Christians, and it is proclaimed that they died in the faith, and people charitably hope that they are gone to heaven.

It was Dr. Doddridge, I think, who so extensively investigated the results of death-bed "conversions." Of two thousand persons who supposed themselves to be dying and who expressed their faith in Christ, only two afterwards gave evidence of true conversion. Don't rely upon death-bed repentance. "Seek first the kingdom of God." If you will not do this, you may never be saved at all.

Once more, many seem to say, "I don't care how many sins I commit, if I can only get to heaven." They go as far as they think they can go in serving the devil and dishonoring God. But let me tell you, if you put God's arrangements out of order, the probability is that your soul will be lost. God says, "Put Jesus Christ and His kingdom first." You say, "Not so, Lord, let it be put last. I must attend to everything else first." God says, "Seek this first." Do let me ask, "Is it not in your best interests to seek it first?" If for that reason alone, why do you not seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first?

In conclusion, let me ask you one question: "Will you decide now to seek this kingdom first, that it may be set up in your heart? Will you pray for this? Will you make it your business to pray? Will you begin now? Now that the Lord says, "Seek ye my face," does your heart reply, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek"? If you delay, your soul may be ruined--lost for ever!