

Seeking the Kingdom of God

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

WHEN JESUS BEGAN HIS earthly ministry he taught his followers many important truths that would prepare them for their new walk in faith. For example, he had just taught them how to pray to the Heavenly Father in an

acceptable manner. He explained, “Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” (Matt. 6:6) The Master then proceeded to present his disciples a model prayer that has become the basis for all other prayers, known as “The Lord’s Prayer.”

Many centuries earlier, the psalmist David revealed the true sentiments of his heart, when he wrote, “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.”

(Ps. 27:4) Later, the Apostle Paul encouraged the Lord's special people, "To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life."—Rom. 2:7

SEEKING THOSE THINGS ABOVE

In his letter to the Colossian brethren, the apostle encouraged them to seek the spiritual blessings which are above. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence [desire], and covetousness, which is idolatry."—Col. 3:1-5

STRIVING DILIGENTLY

Our featured scripture is essentially a culmination of Jesus' 'Sermon on the Mount' which began in the previous chapter of Matthew's gospel. The Master's lessons draw special attention and importance to how we may faithfully strive to receive a position in God's future kingdom, and to the proper development of a Christian character that is based on righteous principles.

Jesus used the words 'seek' and 'first' together to emphasize the initial and primary aim of our walk in newness of life, and as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. The word seek suggests giving thoughtful diligence and heartfelt effort when striving toward a certain goal. Our Lord used the

same word again to put further perspective on this important lesson. He said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."—Matt. 7:7,8

To seek the kingdom of God indicates a strong and deep commitment on the part of every consecrated child of God. It shows a determined effort to make ourselves ready so that we may share with our Lord Jesus, to reign with him in his future kingdom. Only a few will attain to such a high position. Jesus spoke of this class of Christians as a 'little flock.' "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."—Luke 12:32

The glorious prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus will be a supreme gift for all who will demonstrate their love and loyalty to him through the faithful devotion of their all to his cause, and are found faithful to their covenant of sacrifice. The actual everyday carrying out of our commitment, and the terms of our discipleship are very exacting—being faithful to our covenant of sacrifice even unto death.—Rev. 2:10

A NEW WAY OF LIFE

The Lord does not expect us to enter upon the new way of life for the New Creature in Christ Jesus without first sitting down to count the cost. Jesus made this very clear, when he told his followers, "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first,

and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.”—Luke 14:27-30

CROSS-BEARING

The Master spoke of bearing our cross, which suggests endurance in facing our trials and difficulties in our consecrated walk. Cross-bearing is a continuing commitment, and no one can hope to have a share in the glory of joint-heirship with the Christ without being faithful. Cross-bearing consists in our willingness to stand up for the Truth at any cost, and to uphold the principles of righteousness.

Our commitment to God should not be made with the view of simply satisfying ourselves with the hope that what we may gain will be of far greater value than what we give up. Those who have given their heart to our loving Heavenly Father have reached a point of decision in their lives that assures them that the heavenly reward will be given to them for their faithfulness.

COUNTING THE COST

When counting the cost of our consecrated walk, we cannot foresee all of the various trials or difficulties that we may be required to experience, or the full meaning and significance of the sacrificial life ahead. The trials, temptations, and testing of our commitment will be realized more particularly after our consecration, and not before.

Consecration is a serious matter, and to be a faithful disciple of our Lord we need to embark upon a new way of life, even unto death.—Rev. 2:10

The main consideration for those who respond to the heavenly calling and wish to give their life to God, is whether they can faithfully meet all of the obligations and terms of their consecration that will be placed upon them. To count the cost is to put aside all earthly hopes, ambitions, and desires of the flesh.

This matter was addressed by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Philippi. He wrote, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And 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: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."—Phil. 3:7-10

THE NARROW WAY

Jesus emphasized the difficulties of the narrow way of sacrifice by comparing it to a lesson that was understood by those living in his day. He spoke of the gate that enclosed an ancient city that was kept closed and locked during nighttime as a protection for those living within. More particularly he drew attention to a smaller gate within the larger one that could be opened to allow passage into the city. It was called the 'needle's eye' because a camel could only pass through the

gate after its burden had been removed and was then led through the gate on its knees.

The Master had been pointing out that it was very difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. We read, "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 19:21-23) This served as an important illustration because the rich man had more earthly treasures and interests to give up, and it was necessary that he unburden himself by giving all that he possessed to the Lord.

Jesus continued his lesson, saying, "Again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my

name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."—vss. 24-29

The unburdening of the camel and the necessity for it to drop to its knees to pass into the city, illustrated the rich man who must unburden himself of earthly interests and treasures, and to thus humble himself before God. Had the rich man's heart been more pleasing to our loving Heavenly Father, he would have lead him and shown him a way to use his riches in an acceptable manner that would lead him to greater faithfulness. God knows how to overrule all things for the good of his people and to those who desire to know and serve him. "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."—Rom. 8:27,28

The trials and difficulties of the narrow way are shaping, fitting, and preparing us for a share with our Lord Jesus in his future kingdom of righteousness that will be established over all the earth. Let us rejoice at all times and under all circumstances in this wonderful prospect, and learn to watch for the Lord's leading.

JESUS' CUP

Perhaps the seriousness of consecration had not been wisely considered by some, and may have been one of the reasons why Jesus' disciples disputed among themselves as to which of them would be greatest in his future kingdom. The scriptural record provides information that two of his disciples

even made a request that one might sit on Jesus' right hand and the other on his left hand in his future kingdom.—Mark 10:37

Jesus did not discourage his disciples from entertaining the hope of sharing in the glories of his future kingdom, but he did explain that they would need to drink of his cup of experience and share in his baptism unto death. (vss. 38,39) He then told them, "To sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared." (vs. 40) Thus did Jesus make clear the fact that all rewards are given to his faithful followers by the Heavenly Father, and in accordance with their degree of faith and obedience.

The cup of which Jesus spoke was symbolic, and suggested the sum total of all our experiences in walking in the narrow way and seeking the Father's will. It was the cup which the Heavenly Father had poured for Jesus to drink from the time of his baptism at the River Jordan, until he was led to Calvary's cross to give his life for the world.

Jesus loved his earthly parents, the disciples, and others who followed him. From the fleshly standpoint, he could have preferred a course in life which would have taken these into account and permitted him to enjoy their fellowship. However, he could not follow his natural inclinations. He had come to do his Father's will, and to drink of the cup which the Father had poured for him. To be faithful to this purpose it was necessary for him to sever all earthly ties. Jesus said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."—Matt. 8:20

Jesus could have used his inspiring personality and the miracle-working power which had been given to him, to appeal to the public and he could have become the most popular person in the world at that time. However, he understood the task he was given to perform and the message he was to proclaim. He exposed popular error, and was an unflinching advocate of unpopular truth. He was able to read the hearts of his enemies, and knew that they were hypocrites. This evoked their bitter animosity which finally cost him his life. It was all part of the 'cup' which the Father had poured for him.

When speaking of Jesus, Paul pointed out that he, "Made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."—Phil. 2:7-11

OUR CUP

When we make a consecration to do the Father's will, we are also given a cup from which to drink. We can measure the degree of our success in partaking of the cup by considering whether we are truly seeking 'first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.' Doing the will of God was Jesus' first consideration, and it must also be first with

us. He thus advises us, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?—Matt. 6:24,25

Paul said, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but 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.” (Phil. 3:13,14) The Apostle again wrote, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing 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.”—chap. 4:6,7

SEEKING FIRST THE KINGDOM

With the peace of God ruling in our hearts and minds, we may concentrate all of our thoughts and efforts on the wonderful promises pertaining to the future kingdom of our featured scripture. (Matt. 6:33) Thus let us heed the apostle’s encouraging words, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”—Phil. 4:8 ■