

“Therefore take no thought saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the gentiles seek.): for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Mt. 6:31-33

SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM

by Craig Marlatt

How far from the determinations of men are these tremendous principles spoken here by our Lord Jesus Christ? It must have sounded incredible to the disciples that had gathered around him on the mountain that day hearing such things for the first time? To put away their worrying and striving to meet their own daily needs, and put their total trust in God as Jehovah Jireh, (the Provider).

It is one thing to say that God is your Provider, but to “...take no thought” for daily needs is another thing altogether. Yet Jesus was most certainly not trying to devalue these things and say that they were not real needs, but rather to teach his disciples a principle for those who would enter into the Kingdom of God: that God himself would supply all of their needs.

To the average Christian this may seem to be an unreasonable or impractical approach to life, but that is because not everyone who calls themselves a Christian is indeed a disciple. Jesus said that we must be ‘born again’ to see the Kingdom of God. And there are many that see the kingdom as though they were spectators at a sporting event, yet they do not participate in the events themselves. In order participate you must be a member of the team. This requires discipline, and rigorous training and exercise. To be a functioning member of the team one must make a total commitment of his or her energies and desires. Ambitions and goals must also be thrown in if there is to be any real dedication. This is what Jesus meant when He said, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” To be consecrated and wholly devoted: to be filled with, and led by the Spirit, this is to enter into the kingdom.

God has given us talents and abilities and we are accustomed to using these abilities to gain for our loved ones and ourselves the things that we want and need. But in the kingdom, Jesus says, we are to take no thought. How can we do this? Did God not give us these talents and abilities to be used to meet our daily needs? No! The primary purpose of these abilities is to fulfil our place in the kingdom of God, to enable us to become participants in the kingdom and to empower us to do our part in furthering the kingdom. We have wrongly turned the Christian life into a spectator sport with only a few players (ministers) who actively participate. But this is not God’s design, this is man’s.

You may agree to this in theory, but have no idea how to bring it about in your own life. For most men striving and obtaining things is an integral part of our daily lives. It is difficult to let go of life and trust God with our daily supply, but we must realize that “*[our] heavenly Father knows that [we] have need of these things.*” He has built these needs into the human condition, therefore He is not only aware of their significance to us, but He is willing to accommodate us in these areas.

The key to realizing the dynamic life and divine supply to the believer in Matthew 6:31 and 32 is found in verse 33: *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you”*. In order to ‘take no thought’ we must ‘seek first the kingdom!’ Unless we are seeking God’s kingdom and righteousness as our first priority, He cannot supply all of our needs. To do so would be to violate his established authority. If we eliminate his Lordship, we also do away with his provision.

The keys to unlocking verses 31-33 are found in the same chapter of the Gospel of Matthew:

1. Giving- verse 1-4
2. Praying- verses 5-13
3. Forgiveness- verses 14-15
4. Abstinence- verses 16-18
5. Divine Accumulation- verses 19-21
6. Divine Focus- verses 22-23
7. Divine Service- verse 24

In giving we place the needs of others in our hands and our own needs in God’s hands. In the kingdom, one places the emphasis on others and not on self. In so doing everyone’s needs can be met, yet none are consumed with striving to care for themselves. God himself set this precedent when He became a man in the incarnation of Christ. He left his glory, emptied himself, and became a servant (Phil.2:4-8).

Today there are many popular Bible teachers who see clearly that receiving is the result of giving, but do not teach the proper motive: We do not give to receive. We give to give! We give to further the kingdom of God. When we combine Divine principles with carnal motives we only reaffirm the arrogant selfishness of man. Historically we can see that this does not advance the kingdom, it just builds up the accumulation of worldly possessions for the church organized.

Some teach that the testimony of the last day’s Church will be controlling interest in worldly wealth and affairs. But how does this coincide with our being strangers and pilgrims? . . . Sojourners in a strange land? (Heb. 11:13,37,38; 1 Pet. 1:17).

God does not glory in our poverty, to be sure. But neither does He get any glory by our being rich. God only gets glory in our lives when we *“seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness”*. Whatever station in life we are in, this is an attainable goal.

God’s Purpose in Provision

Let us examine two other portions of scripture to see God’s purpose in such a method of Divine provision. In Exodus 16:4-16 Moses writes, *“Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. . . And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an Omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating.”*

And again in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15, *“For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye be burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there*

may be an equality: as it is written, he that gathered much had nothing over; and he that gathered little had no lack.”

In these portions of scripture we can see yet another of God’s principles for life in the kingdom. Briefly stated, this is the principle: God’s method of provision is for the proving of his people. Let’s look at the text in Exodus 16:4. God said, “*I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.*” The manna was obviously to be food for the Israelites, but God herein states that it has yet another purpose: To prove his people, and to test them for the purpose of seeing where their hearts were. If they obeyed God, and the gathering of the manna was done just as He had commanded them, they would be satisfied and filled. If they became selfish and gathered more than enough, or tried to store some for future use, the manna would rot, and stink, and bring forth worms. It was a test of obedience, and God used that thing which was closest to their hearts- food!

Now let us look at the verses from 2 Corinthians 8. The entirety of this chapter is dealing with giving and receiving. Paul was telling the Corinthians that it was very obvious that God had blessed them and provided them with an abundance of (spiritual) manna. Verse 7 reads: “*Therefore, as ye abound in everything, in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us . . .*” There is the principle of God’s provision: This was the spiritual manna. God had spread it out on the ground before them, and the Corinthian Church had picked it up. There was an abundance of spiritual gifts operating in the Church, but the testing and proving were yet to come. God wanted to see if they would obey him, so Paul says: since you abound in these gifts, “. . . see that ye abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but by the occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.”

God’s provision for them was not for themselves, but for the kingdom of God. Paul was encouraging those who had been abundantly blessed to now become channels of blessing for others who were less fortunate. As a further incentive he reminds them in verse 9 of the “*grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich, yet He became poor that [they] through his poverty might become rich*” . What greater encouragement could there be than to admonish them to follow in the footsteps of Christ?

Since He had given all for them, it was right that they should do likewise for each other. There can be no doubt that God, through his Son Jesus Christ, means for his Church to prosper and to have all things, but it is in this prosperity that God proves the motives of his people. This is built into the two commandments of the New Covenant: Love God first, and love others second. When the kingdom of God is first in our lives, then that with which God blesses us will become a blessing to those around us. It is in our giving and meeting the needs of those less fortunate, that God proves the motives of our hearts. “*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*” (Matt. 6:21).

It is not because God needs to know our motives, but rather He desires to reveal our hearts to us so that we can invite him in to purify our unclean hearts and motives. The kingdom of God is fulfilled in the people of God. The blessings of God are the instruments that God uses to bring to light our true heart condition.

Jesus said, “*The poor you will have with you always.*” , but this is an indictment against our selfishness, not an expression of God’s will. When the Spirit of God is alive within a converted heart, his desire is to alleviate the suffering and to bring life to those

around us. Without a willing Church, there will be no dynamic revival. If we want to see God's kingdom manifested around us, it must first be manifested in and through us.