

Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God

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I'd like to tell you about a man. In 1905 he was 30 years old. At that time he had two doctorate degrees -- in theology and in philosophy. He was an accomplished and world-famous organist. He was a professor at a university and for a period of time he was a leader, what we would call the president, of a seminary. At 30 years old, he had a brilliant career in front of him.

But, unbeknownst to his friends, to his relatives, to the people closest to him, he had made a decision prior to that. In 1896 he made the decision to go to medical school and eventually go to Equatorial Africa as a missionary.

We know that man as Albert Schweitzer; we know him as a modern-day saint, as a great man of God. We know him not only as a theologian and a man who knew Jesus' teachings, who preached Jesus' message to his congregation and to his students, but we also know him as a man of action. In 1905 no one had any idea of what was in Albert Schweitzer's mind, but suddenly he announced to the world, to his family, to his friends, that he was going to Africa. But first that he was going to study medicine for seven years.

Why would a man give up a brilliant career and that kind of opportunity to go to the most primitive part of the world to face floods, famine, pestilence. Eventually he was imprisoned as a prisoner of war during World War I. Several times in his life he was on the verge of death because of illness. He was serving the people of Africa. He was concerned about humanity.

In 1906, Albert Schweitzer published a book and it was called *Quest for the Historical Jesus*. He had published several books previously on Jesus; he knew deeply Jesus' mind and Jesus' heart. He had read over a thousand books on the life and ministry of Jesus. And he came to the conclusion at that time that much of traditional Christendom had lost the essence of Christ's teaching, which is the concept of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus said, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." "You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Many people in the past, and many people today, believe that those ideals that Jesus taught are too high, that they're too difficult. But Albert Schweitzer, in *Quest for the Historical Jesus*, said that the essence of Jesus' teaching is the concept of the Kingdom of God, and that for Jesus it was a reality, not simply something spiritual, not something one was just to believe, but it was to be part of our daily lives. We are to be true Christians.

Jesus, of course, has set the ultimate example. As a man he was disappointed, he was frustrated, he was

persecuted, and he was mocked. He went with a message but his message was not easily received. He was a man with a new message, a new vision for mankind. Many of his aims were misunderstood. People could not understand what Jesus was doing, why he was saying the things he was saying. In agony, in pain, in sorrow, he went to the cross. And he set the ultimate example.

Now we ourselves are not necessarily called to that kind of sacrifice. But if we have the heart of Jesus, if we have the heart of Saint Paul and Saint Francis and John Huss and the great martyrs, then we can revolutionize and change ourselves and the world. Jesus' message was the kingdom of God. He said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and then all things will come to you." Jesus was not an ascetic, although to some extent he may have led an ascetic life, but he was a man of action, a man concerned about the realities of the world. When he says, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth," he's talking about dealing with every aspect of human society.

Today we have a world in which men of religion are not participating in government, in business, in society. But Jesus' ideal is for the true Christian to be totally active, to be totally involved, to be concerned, to love, to sacrifice, to give for others; for the individual to sacrifice for families, families for the community, the community for the nation, and the nation for the world. If we have men of God, men of heart, men of feeling and experience, men who want to truly love their brothers and sisters, their neighbors, men with a deep relationship with God, if we had those types of men in government, in business, in every walk of life, then America would be that ultimate ideal.

America was founded upon great principles. Unfortunately, at this moment there's some confusion, but the greatness of America is still here and it's in each and every one of us. Jesus gave his life that we might have eternal life. He sacrificed for us. He gave his life without bitterness, without complaint, without excuse. He could have walked away from the cross, but he did not. That was a sacrifice for us.

There have been times in the past when people have talked about asceticism or self-denial or sacrifice and have thought of it as something negative. But actually, self-denial is something positive. It's an affirmation of life, of joy. For myself and for many people in the past as well, we have been unable to get beyond ourselves. But the great men in history, the Albert Schweitzer's and the Saint Paul's and Saint Francis's of history have been men who were able to go beyond their own interests, their own thoughts, their own desires, their own situations, to help other people. Each of us has our own individual situation. A man like Albert Schweitzer felt a call to go to Africa. We don't necessarily have to go to Africa, but within our own society, within our own communities, within our own individual hearts, we can have the same standard of love, of service to others.

Jesus gave his life. At the moment it may have seemed fruitless, but as we look back at history we see the greatness of his sacrifice. At the moment that Albert Schweitzer chose to go to Africa, his friends could not understand. But as we look back, we can see the greatness of these men. The saints of the past have had a vision, a hope, a mystical experience with God, and went beyond their own individual situations. Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all things will be given unto you." That does not mean that we do not participate in life. Jesus said, all things will be given unto us. But Jesus is emphasizing the priority -- if we first seek the kingdom of God, then we need not worry or be anxious about the future, about our individual situations. God will provide us with the money, with the opportunity, with the careers by which we can fulfill our own lives and the lives of others.

Someone once said that when we first read Jesus' teaching it seems as though Jesus has turned everything upside down. Jesus said, "He who seeks to gain his life will lose it; and he who loses his life will gain it." When we first look at that passage our impression is, Jesus has turned things upside down. But when we read it a second time, we realize that in fact Christ is turning everything right-side-up. He's emphasizing the priorities within our lives. We might say, he who loses his lower life, will gain his higher life. Jesus is talking about a higher life, he's talking about eternal life. He's talking about an experience with God and he's talking about joy and happiness.

The question is, what makes life meaningful? What is important? How can I as an individual or any one of us be happy? We can be happy if we follow this commandment of Jesus: Seek ye first the kingdom of God. Secondly, His righteousness. Thirdly, all things will be given unto us. All great men in the past, all great religious leaders - Buddha, Saint Francis -- have taught this one cardinal principle, the principle of unselfish giving, loving, serving other people. Jesus said: What profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul. The way to destruction is wide, and the way to the kingdom of God is narrow. Jesus set the example. He is our model. He said, ye are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. He wanted each and every one of us, myself and all of us, to be like him, to be living examples of his teaching and the reality of his life.

Jesus stood for righteousness, goodness, hope and the future. He brought a new conscience to mankind. He brought us a sense of sin, so that we feel our own inadequacy and our need for God. He brought us a sense of right and wrong, and he brought us to a new level of understanding. He challenges us. Our ideals are high and they're not easy to obtain. Maybe no one has ever achieved them other than Christ himself.

But it's the vision that can propel us into the future, into a good world, a world of happiness and joy, a world in which people can live together as brothers.

What motivated the great men of God in the past? What motivated Saint Paul or Saint Francis or Albert Schweitzer? It was a vision, it was an ideal, something that they saw that they could do for others. They were on fire with Christ's message and Christ's love. Jesus inspired them. If I personally were to give one word that signifies the Unification Church, I would choose unselfish giving or selfless sacrifice. There are many words that depict the Unification movement and Reverend Sun Myung Moon -- love, persistence, unity, many words, but most importantly -- selfless giving, selfless sacrifice, service to mankind. Jesus said, to those who seek to follow me, they should first deny themselves, take up their own cross, and follow. He was emphasizing, to die to ourselves and be reborn, to have new life.

It seems a paradox, contradictory. But in the process of giving, of loving, of serving, of thinking of others and thinking beyond ourselves to the communities and nations in which we live, we ourselves gain happiness and joy.

Historically, the path of men of God has not been easy. As I study history, I think of many examples and I'm inspired by them, but I see the suffering of great men. They came with visions and often they were misunderstood. Society required a man like Socrates to take poisoned hemlock and to die. Initially St. Thomas Aquinas was rejected. Of course, after a period of time, his teachings were accepted and became the very core of Christianity. The Christian martyrs faced death, but they had faith, they had courage, and they had conviction, and without firearms, without weapons, they were able to transform Rome.

I can think of examples in American history -- Nathan Hale, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln. There are many examples of great men. Martin Luther King, John Kennedy are men of the present times. When I think of Lincoln I think of the kinds of difficulties that Lincoln had, the way in which the press attacked him, the way people could not understand him, and the struggles that he had. But we know today, as we look back at history, the greatness of Abraham Lincoln. We know that he was a man of heart, of concern for his nation, a man who wanted to sacrifice everything to keep America one united body. We know Lincoln was a patriot.

Of course, the patriots, the saints have been men who are unusual in history. We ourselves are not called upon as those saints were, but in our own individual lives, at whatever level we can, if we can think of serving others, of loving our neighbor as ourselves, then we can fulfill Christ's commandment.

Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all things will be given unto you. He who seeks to gain his life will lose it; he who loses it, will gain it." Jesus was talking about life, our eternal lives. He had a message for mankind and his message was the message of the kingdom of God. Jesus' message was for each and every one of us to take up our cross, to do what we can to establish the kingdom of God within our own hearts, within our families, our communities, our nation, and our world. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God."