

## Michael Costelli - Seek Ye First

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So for generations this is the key point. The Jewish people look for the land to the land for their reward for faithful obedience, and heaven was not understood by them. But Jesus brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 2 Timothy 1:10.

So after 4,000 years of sin and death, life was being defined for the world as continuous life on earth based on obedience to God. But additionally, a new concept of life on a spirit plane was announced to those who would follow Jesus into his death through a total commitment to his doctrine. Hebrews 6:1 2 John 1:9 the Almighty Creator of the universe is now selecting from among mankind a bride for his Son to participate in the restitution work of the millennial age to come. Their reward will be to assist Jesus in raising the sin, sick, death, dead of the world to life and teaching them the requirements of the coming age. This message would be one that needed time to develop in the minds of the hearers.

Such is always the case when one tries to convince another of an idea that challenges the citadel of his mind and his heart also. So we read of Jesus's travels and activities in chapters four through six. As his message is heralded to groups and individuals, Jesus goes first about the selection of a special group of men who are called apostles, starting with Peter and Andrew, and drew them into service by his simple message of Follow me and I will make you fishers of men. He then turned his attention to James, the son of Zebedee and John, his brother. With the same message they followed him.

The account in Matthew says he went about in all Galilee, teaching, preaching and healing. Matthew 4:23 John 2:11 states the situation this way. The beginning of miracles did Jesus in Canaan Cana of Galilee and manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed on him. Jesus knew that actions spoke louder than words, so he exemplified the blessings of the kingdom for their better understanding. He preached the healing message of the kingdom and then showed them in the real time by his miracles the effect of the resurrection to come.

And this word of healing spread all through Syria. Multitudes followed him from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond Jordan, and Jesus's popularity was really spreading. He went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people. Matthew 4:23 as Brother Russell points out in his comments, Jesus and his followers could teach the people there, but in time they shunned not to declare the whole gospel of God.

Doubtless they soon found little or no opportunity to teach the people in the synagogues. He was addressing a generation that had been schooled in the Law covenant, which required works and produced behaviors to that end, and now he's introducing them to the faith mechanism needed to please God. Well, we read in Hebrews 11:6, but without faith it is impossible to please God to please him. For he is he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Chapter five opens by telling us, after the pressing of the multitudes, Jesus withdraws and goes up into a mountain, and when he was set, his disciples came unto him. Matthew 5:2. At this point, Jesus turns to what is known as the Beatitudes. In these Jesus gives the core value of his Heavenly Father of the heart of his Heavenly Father.

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Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake, and finally rejoice and begotten exceeding glad for your great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they, the prophets which were before you. After these beatitudes, which could be called, I guess, in modern language, general directives, Jesus begins to specify their significance for our behaviors.

Excuse me. Jesus uses symbols to illustrate the need to broadcast the message of the kingdom. By calling his followers the light of the world which cannot be hid, and continues by saying, neither do men light a candle, but put it under a book, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house, and here we're reminded of the expression the household of Faith in Galatians 6:10 and elsewhere as the household of God, of course, of the household are our brethren and our families. They should be the first to see our Christian development.

For if we do not provide for our own, and especially for those of our own house, we have denied the faith and are worse than an infidel, and we don't want to be among those who are described as such in First Timothy 5:8 if we lack doing what Jesus spoke of, then we should earnestly pray for an increase of faith and zeal to proclaim our faith. Jesus grew up learning the law and the requirements and over time became aware of its his role in implementing His Father's will on earth as it is in heaven. He spoke about the law and the prophets because he knew that was the foundation of their religion and faith, the Gospel. So as not to over undermine the teachings of the law, Jesus clarifies the relationship between the law and his teaching his teaching in Matthew 5:17 20 and contrasts his followers righteousness with the Pharisees by saying, think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets I am come to destroy.

I've come not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. But whosoever shall do and teach them the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Further on, Jesus lists reconciliation with your brother as essential before proper prayer can be offered, and the solution is if we have a grievance with our brother or our sister that needs correction, we need to rectify that situation to satisfaction before we can approach our Heavenly Father. He initiates the teaching that the mere thought of evil superseded the acting out of it as far as God was concerned. You all probably remember the famous mention of former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, who clarified the Scripture for the United states in Matthew 5:28 by stating that the thought of committing adultery in one's heart own heart was as if he committed the very act.

He caught a lot of flack for that. After Jesus teaches on the Law in chapter five, he begins to deal with the subjects of anger, divorce, oaths, retaliation, enemies, almsgiving, prayer, fasting, treasure in heaven, and our convention theme of seeking God's kingdom. First, Jesus moves the goalposts

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of Christian development further out as he gets more intimate with his brethren by instructing them not only on their behavior but on their thoughts and aspirations. As chapter six opens, Jesus teaches the need for private worship of God rather than public displays of the same we're not to attract the attention of others as did the Pharisees, Jesus criticized them for their love of attention and vain repetitions. Rather, he tells us to enter our closets and close the door.

We're to access the throne of grace often and leave the world behind. To guarantee a successful communication with our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus gave us a wonderful example to follow that is recorded in Matthew 14:23 when he said, and when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray, and when the evening was come, he was there alone. We should all have our prayer closets if we are rightly exercised as described in Hebrews 5:14. I would suggest that strong meat is the subject under discussion here. In chapter six we sing what a privilege it is to take it to the Lord in prayer.

Indeed, it's a privilege that the world knows nothing about. If we need help with prayer, we can, like the apostles, ask the Lord teach us to pray. Essential to heavenly, to effective prayer is honesty and sincerity about one's self examination. We will need that wisdom that is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruit, without impartial partiality and without hypocrisy. Thank you for breaking the rules.

We'll need that wisdom to help implement his will in our lives. We'll need an increase in faith, an increase in zeal, spiritual energy and strength to deal with the problems of the world as they touch our lives. So, like the apostles, we can ask the Lord to increase our faith. Luke 17:5 Increasingly, there are a lot of distractions now out there in the world to discourage us. Brother Kent gave us some examples this morning.

Not to discourage, but to just make us aware. We can easily get discouraged, discouraged by comparing our Christian walk with our brethren. We must measure ourselves by the perfect standard of Jesus. We're given some guidance in that effort as we read. For even the apostle could not judge himself as we read in First Corinthians 4, verses 2 through 5.

Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man should be that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you or of man's judgment. Yea, I judge not mine own self, for I know nothing by myself, yet I am not hereby justified. But he that judgeth me is the Lord.

The faithfulness that Paul is speaking of is our stewardship, and Brother Russell comments in reprint 1972 where he says, moreover, says the apostle, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful, and the parables under consideration show what is considered as faithfulness to our stewardship. To receive the gifts. To merely receive the gifts of God.

And is not faithfulness, though many may think so. But many indeed seem to think they have done God a great favor in merely accepting his grace through Christ, and are satisfied to make no further efforts. But such make a great mistake. For faithfulness, as here shown, consists in a proper and diligent use of our gifts in harmony with the divine purpose and methods, and both the Lord and the apostles point to a day of reckoning when even the secret things will be brought to light, and all the counsels of the heart shall be made manifest foreign.

It's also a privilege to unburden our hearts from the pressing matters of daily living that can come to us through our families, through our work, our associates and friends. We're told by the apostle that

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all things work together for good to them that are called according to his purpose. What are the all things for you and for me? Are they the loss of family members and death? Marriage breakups, Children going astray from what they were taught?

If we keep in mind that in all things we are comforted, we can continue our walk with the Lord without discouragement. But remember, blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. So with that and other assurances, there's no other. Also no reason that we should ever cower in fear or or persistently doubt whether the Lord is on our side. Jesus chided his disciples about doubting when they in the boat they cried out for fear.

He told them, be of good cheer. It's I be not afraid. Matthew 14:26 what a great example of fear coming on us just because of outside threats. I know having rid having a boat in the Gulf of Mexico in years past, going out and getting into a gale storm. It really humbled you quickly and you were praying for the Lord's safe passage.

So I can just relate to the disciples, but the Lord was in the boat with me.

The same kind of fears can assail us when we become anxious over our future affairs regarding money, securities, and so forth, and fear. You know, fear and anxiety are related. Fear and anxiety often occur together, but these terms are not interchangeable. Fear is an intense biological response to immediate danger, while anxiety is an emotion regarding things which we think may happen.

What are the common causes of fear? Darkness or loss of visibility of surroundings, heights and flying. Social interaction and or rejection. Snakes, rodents, spiders and other animals. Death from dying.

The Internet. Excuse me, the Internet gives us 10 ways to fight Our Fears I found a list that kind of interested me. One is to take time out so you can physically calm down. Secondly, breathe through the panic. Deep breathing in a controlled manner like yoga and such can help you deal with things facing your fears and repeat the terrifying event that you just went through.

See that you actually made it through it. Imagine the worst and then compare it to the scary event and it'll pale by comparison. Look at the evidence. It might be safer than you imagine. On expect on inspection.

Don't try to be perfect because none of us are. This one gets me Visualize a happy place. Psychiatrists tell us to do that. It's the power of mind over matter and the Lord can take us to that happy place. Talk about it.

Sharing fears takes away a lot of the scariness. Go back to basics. Simple everyday things like a good night's sleep, a wholesome meal and a walk can be the best cures for anxiety, and reward yourself. Give yourself a treat if you've overcome something.

Whatever makes you happy. However, regardless of what the Lord the world tells us, true relief from fear is centered in our Master Jesus. His words in 6:24 touch on so many significant issues of life that the restless crowds of mankind still deal with and unsuccessfully, and why unsuccessfully and with great trepidation do they fear. Most of them lack faith in God.

Most of them don't believe in God. Some have too much self assurance to allow them to help from an all powerful God, and some have been beaten down continuously by the vicissitudes of life. Life

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with no hope or help for help from man. Just so many heartbreaking situations we see in our daily lives.

And now we see it played out in broad daylight in our major cities in the United States. With the proliferation of homeless and drug addicted persons living on the streets, all of them can use and do need the wonderful healing of the Master, if only they would let him.

Jesus left us with what is known as the Lord's Prayer. It incorporates all the aspects of the consecrated life in Jesus. The prayer begins Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive those our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen. Bringing us to our convention text of Matthew 6:33 all of the instructions we've discussed thus far in chapters four through six are some of the all things I think Jesus is talking about when he says, seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you. The things of daily life, such as relationships, food, drink, clothing. Jesus knows about all our needs, and he's not discounting our effort to secure such.

He reminds us of the care His Father gives to the birds of the air, the lilies of the field, and the grass of the field. If these things of nature are under his care daily and have endured through the ages, how much more is he going to care for us? As Brother Russell points out in the Scripture comments, these get their food and their glory in God's appointed way for them. So man must get his food in God's appointed way for him. He's prioritizing those things for us so that we place him and his Father first.

And that word first is 4414 in Strong's Concordance, which is proton or chiefly at the beginning, firstly in time, place, order, or importance and the object of the seeking is the kingdom of God and His righteousness. These are to be the chief aims of our life since taking the name of Jesus, and with zeal are we to pursue those things, those things the Master admonished, or as Solomon expressed in Ecclesiastes 9:13 Whatsoever thy hands findeth to do, do it with thy might for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whether thou goest as we examine the life of Jesus, we note, among other qualities, his energy in doing the work of his Father in heaven. He was not extravagant, but taught his followers to be, as the apostle Paul expresses it, not slothful in business, fervent in the spirit, serving the Lord. Romans 12:11, Matthew 6:19.

Jesus begins a discussion about material possessions and their vulnerability to theft or corruption. Treasures on earth might include mental and physical pleasure, delight, joy, comfort counseled elsewhere in Psalm 37:4 that we shall light ourselves in the Lord he shall give thee the desires of thine heart, and what do we desire? We desire his righteousness. We want to be like Jesus now as much as possible, for that when he shall appear, we shall be like him.

We shall see him as as he is. Jesus also teaches on the subject of permanence by illustrations of moths and gold.

Although they can't damage our clothes in our closet, gold doesn't rust. Speaking of thieves breaking in and stealing our day now a lot you hear about home title lock, property title insurance. Not the kind you get for real estate closings, but one to prevent someone from getting into your home title and changing the name on it. There's been a lot of occasions advertised with people losing their title to property through actions of online thieves, and the point, the point is that these

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earthly treasures, they lose their value to us at death.

And often some oftentimes before. Think about it. When Jesus was sent out his apostles, he said, provide neither gold nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor script for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes nor yet staves for the workman is worthy of his meat, and think about it. Jesus had no place to lay his head.

Luke 9:58 Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. By contrast, what can we say are present day conveniences with which we go and serve the Lord and the brethren. We get the right place to stay and the right meals. We don't even approach some of the things that our apostles went forward on.

After losing his children, livestock, camels and servants, Job exclaimed in job 121, he said, naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord, and he said this after the loss of most of his oxen and their servants, the sheep and the camels also, and his children. What a terrible loss.

But we note the response of Job and what an example it is to us. For sure, Jesus is not here teaching us to be irresponsible in our daily obligations. For we read in 1st Timothy 5:8. But if any man provide not for his own, especially for those of his own house, he is denied the faith, and worse than an infidel, and further in 1st Corinthians 16:2, upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

This value of earthly things should be to us as believers, servants ready to be used in time of need. If we do not get our values into perspective that Jesus teaches, we run the risk of having our spiritual vision clouded or even lost. For the Scriptures teach us that the degree of our blessing in the age to come will stand related to the use of our present life.

His righteousness is that which Jesus admonishes his followers in Matthew 6:33 to pursue above all else in life, including food, verses 25 through 27, including clothing 25, 28 through 30, and including housing. Where we've just read, the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head. In verse 24 Jesus points out that there are two masters, and the competing interests each have in the life of the consecrated God and mammon and we must choose God over mammon. He sets the proper priority that we ought to have in every decision that we make. He expressed that fact in this manner.

Wherever your heart your treasure is, there will your heart be. The Jamison Fawcett Brown commentary renders mammon a foreign word whose precise derivation cannot certainly be determined, though the most probable one gives it the sense of what one trusts in speaking on mammon. Brother Russell writes in portions of reprim. 2559 to read as follows, and this was written over 100 years ago, but it sounds more like today. Probably no period of the world's history has ever had such great need as our own for this lesson.

The spirit of our times seems to lead directly to the service of mammon. Wealth, earthly advantages and comforts, goes on to say what is known as the progress of civilization. In many respects good excellent. But it has the wrong motive power. The motive power of modern progress is selfishness, mammonism, and increasingly so.

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Nor can we imagine that the civilized world, intellectually awakened, but not in heart regenerated, not possessed of the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love, could be in its present condition moved by any other spirit than that which possesses it. The spirit of selfishness, the spirit of mammon. We are not therefore surprised to see what we do see on every hand a mad rush and struggle for wealth, and for position and fame, which are wealth of another kind and bring financial wealth. The spirit of selfishness in the millionaire stirs him to activity and to the use of the his opportunities, not because he needs more, but because he is possessed of the spirit of avarice, the spirit of mammon. The same spirit exactly takes hold of the artisan who with a moderate income has secured for himself and his family a modest little home and frugal competence.

Many of these are now reaching out for wealth and finding by experience the truth of the apostles words they that will to be rich, whether they succeed in carrying out their will or not. If they have the will, the mammon spirit fall into temptations and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, desires and habits which drown men in destruction and perdition for the love of money. The mammon spirit is the root of all, is a root of all evil, which while some coveted after they have erred from the faith crowding at the spirit of love and wisdom from above, and losing the spirit of the truth also the letter of the truth and the faith, and pierce themselves through with many arrows. First Timothy 6, 10 and 11 in verse 25 Jesus tells us, therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life what you shall eat, what you shall drink, nor yet for your body what you shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment?

The English word thought, when King James Version was done, expressed the idea of solicitude or anxious concern, similar to how was used in 1st Samuel 9:15 when when they were come into the land of Zilf, Saul said unto his servant that was with him, come, let us return, lest my Father leave, or cease caring for the asses and take thought for us. An anxious thought is what Saul was talking about. Saul's father would begin to worry about him if he didn't return from looking for the lost asses of his father. However, the thought of solicitude has gone out and the casual reader could be confused. The apostle Paul counsels against anxious or oppressive care arising from doubts, and so forth, and in Philippians 4, 6 tells us, Be careful for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication and thanksgiving, let your request be main owed unto God.

So in conclusion, the apostle Paul tells expresses Matthew 6:33 best this way when he writes in Philippians 3:13 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. Paul was an accomplished student and doctor of the law. He had a lot going for him. He was religiously and politically correct and had the respect of even the Roman government. However, he considered all these accomplishments as done that he might win Christ and brethren, isn't that our choice today as we go through our activities?

Regardless of what we may have accomplished in our lives thus far, Paul outlines for us and points us to the future time in our consecration service. So let us close by considering what the apostle Paul tells us in Hebrews 12:2 Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. May the Lord add his blessing.