

SEEKING OR BUILDING THE KINGDOM?

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SCRIPTURE: Matthew 6:31-33.

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. (King James version.)

Wherefore, seek not the things of this world; but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. (...Inspired Version.)

One of the ever-present problems of Christianity is the problem of deciding how much of religion is "~~other-worldly~~" and how much is "~~this-worldly~~." The scriptures are filled with injunctions similar to the one Paul wrote to the Colossians -- "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." (3:2) Jesus said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth..... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven," and "My kingdom is not of this world." Some people have preferred to stress these verses and the attitude towards life which they represent. Others have preferred to consider them with their context, and to believe that Jesus was concerned more about this world than about the world to come.

Back and forth between these two ideas, the pendulum of public thought and Christian belief has swung. In medieval times, and even to some extent today, Christian people held the idea that this world is vile, the body a necessary evil, and this life but a transitory and inconsequential state to be endured with as good grace as possible in preparation for a better world. Man was only a stranger here; heaven was his home. Men sought to assure themselves of that heavenly home of bliss and happiness and comfort, by denying themselves every possible comfort here. They lived as hermits in the desert. They wore rough clothes. They scourged themselves. Their diet was meager and monotonous. They ignored the people about them. They despised and renounced all money and property. They did everything possible to belittle and discommodo themselves physically, and to indicate their scorn of this world, and their preference for a heaven after death.

On the other hand, there have been men in many ages of the world who believed that the kingdom of God was to come to this earth, and to be expressed in practicalities of social, economic, and religious intercourse. Plato's REPUBLIC, St. Augustine's CITY OF GOD, Sir Thomas More's UTOPIA, Butler's EREWHON, and EREWHON REVISITED, Campanella's CITY OF THE SUN, Bellamy's LOOKING BACKWARD, and more recently, some of H. G. Wells' writings, have all been attempts to draw plans and blue prints for an ideal social state, which Christian people are accustomed to call the kingdom of God. The ancient Hebrew prophets were constantly concerned with the practicalities of life here and now -- with such problems as poverty, disease, political economy, justice between man and man, etc. -- which are certainly problems of this world. Jesus quoted one of those ancient prophets when he announced the purpose of his ministry -- "to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and the recovery of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised." Jesus was certainly concerned with the "other-worldly" aspect of his message, but he was equally concerned about the more abundant life in this world.

Even today, however, we still have our differences about the main emphasis of Christianity. Shall we endure this life merely as a difficult preparation for the next, or shall we make of this life so profitable and enjoyable, that there shall be no break or cessation of life when we pass through the experience of death? Is the good life to be achieved without effort on our part -- merely discovered by us, or is it to be the result of careful and prayerful and extended preparation and care and toil, that God's kingdom might be?

The difference between these two attitudes is focused by the difference in the translation of two Bible verses, which are found near the close of the 6th chapter of Matthew. The King James version says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things (i.e. food and drink and raiment) shall be added unto you." The Douay version reads very similarly. The Moffat version reads "Seek God's realm and his goodness, and all that will be yours over and above." But in contrast to this the Inspired Version of the Bible, as corrected by Joseph Smith reads: "Wherefore seek not the things of this world; but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

There are many seekers after the kingdom, even today. They are looking for something finished, and completed -- a place into which they can move and forever be at rest. They seek with the mental and spiritual attitude that the Kingdom of God exists somewhere, if they could just find it. They search and search, as men before them have searched for Eldorado, or the Fountain of Youth, or the Philosopher's stone which would change lead into gold. All their energy and time goes into SEARCHING, and none into DOING.

There are many seekers after God's righteousness today, and even some finders, but few who will become DOERS once they have sought and found. And still fewer will make any real, determined attempt to make that righteousness the rule of life among other men, other nations, and throughout the world. We may seek diligently for his righteousness, find it in his scriptures, and in the life of his Son, Jesus; we may even understand and appreciate it, but unless we "seek to establish it" by living it in our own lives and exemplifying it in our relationships with other men, the mere finding will do us no good. We may seek diligently to find the kingdom of God, but if we have not made ourselves the kind of people who could dwell in such a kingdom; if we have made no growth, no development, no spiritual progress through working to build up that kingdom, we shall not be worthy to dwell there even if we have found it.

It is well that we should recognize the "other-worldliness" of God's kingdom, but it is equally important that we should not overlook the "this-worldliness" of it. It is well to seek first the kingdom, but it is better to seek the ways and means of BUILDING that kingdom, so that we ourselves may help to bring about the accomplishment of the things for which we seek. It is well that we should seek his righteousness, but if we find that righteousness and try to live it alone in a barren desert, we shall be no nearer the kingdom of God than we were before. It will be necessary for us to SEEK TO ESTABLISH that righteousness, by living righteously in our "this-worldly" associations together. Only when all the poor have been lifted out of their poverty, when all the broken hearted are bound up, when all the captives are delivered, all the deaf made to hear, all the blind restored to sight, all the oppressed restored to their rights, all the injustices of man to man made right, will his righteousness be ESTABLISHED.

It takes some energy, some thought, some diligence, some perseverance, to SEEK for the kingdom, hoping that some day we will find it ready made. But it takes

vastly more of thought and diligence and perseverance and energy to seek to BUILD UP the kingdom of God. Seeking to build up the kingdom of God is not necessarily an ignoring of the "other-worldly" character of the kingdom, but a recognition that the spiritual or "other-worldly" aspects of the kingdom of God have to do with "this-worldly" things. We do not need to ignore either aspect of our task. We do need to lay up our treasures in heaven. We do need to set our affections on things above. We do need to recognize that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, in the sense that it will not be established after the popular or accepted ways of this world. Jesus never denied or belittled man's need of food and drink and raiment. It was he who fed the four thousand, and the five thousand, when they were far from the normal source of food supply. But what Jesus was trying to teach was that if man is spiritually changed so that his first consideration is the Kingdom of God -- if he takes no anxious thought, and refuses to be unnecessarily worried about this world's needs, that the practicalities of the Kingdom of God will take care of those practical and worldly needs through the operation of spiritual laws.

Whenever a sufficient group of men can be found who are willing to set their affections on things above, to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven, to become citizens of the Kingdom of God on earth, "all these things," such as food and raiment and security of life and of property and of home, will automatically follow. But the man who seeks food first, disregarding the principles of the kingdom, or the man who worries and selfishly tries to achieve security for himself through selfishness, will never even find the kingdom, no matter how long or how diligently he merely SEEKS it. He must not only SEEK it, but he must SEEK TO BUILD IT UP, and to ESTABLISH GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS.

A great weakness of many people, and of many churches, is their utter lack of practicality -- their "other-worldliness" -- their so-called "spirituality" which ignores the necessary and practical material things of this world with which we have to deal. Too much in times past have we regarded this world as a kind of concentration camp where man is detained against his will, and surrounded by all sorts of evil. Too much have we regarded heaven as the dwelling place of a lot of repatriated refugees, who had suffered the buffetings of evil in the far country of this world, and who had at last returned home to a city ready made, where all would be peace and joy and rest. The world desperately needs a blending of the practical and the spiritual -- a seeking of the kingdom and a seeking to build up the kingdom -- a seeking after righteousness, and a seeking to establish that righteousness.

When Paul wrote to the Colossians admonishing that they set their minds on things above, he proceeded to give some very practical and worldly advice. He advised against fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, lying. He admonished them to love, humility, forbearance, forgiveness, charity, and mutual helpfulness. He admonished husbands and wives to love and obey each other, and children to obey their parents. He instructed servants to obey their masters. All these were practical considerations important for those who were seeking to build up, rather than to find already builded, the Kingdom of God.

The Latter Day Saint concept of the Kingdom of God is caught up in one word -- Zion. Zion is not to be in some heavenly world, but here. We could enjoy it now, if there were enough people who had sought to build it up, and to establish the righteousness which is a necessary forerunner of it. It will be achieved only when there is prepared a group of people who have so set their hearts on things above, that they have brought an "other-worldly" quality into their "this-worldly" life, a group of people whose FIRST consideration is not food or drink or raiment or security -- but the kingdom -- a group of people whose lives are devoted to the building up of the kingdom and the establishing of God's righteousness. With God's help we aspire to be some day such a group--a nucleus to which God can add others, and to which "all these things" may also be added in due season.