

FIRST THINGS FIRST
or
Profitable Spiritual Pursuits
Mt.6:33
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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Before studying Mt.6:33 as a text in context, a passage that sets forth the idea of “first things first,” and two things we are to “seek first,” we introduce our study of “First Things First” in a general way.
2. In using the expression “first things first,” we are simply saying, “Put those things first that belong first;” that is, in the order in which they come. In other words, keep your spiritual priorities straight.
3. There are many things that must come first before something else can follow; such as:
 - a. Adequate cause before an effect.
 - b. Sowing before reaping a harvest.
 - c. Conception before birth.
 - d. Crawling before walking.
 - e. Food and exercise before physical strength.
 - f. Infant state before manhood.
 - g. Faith before pleasing God.
4. To try to change these would change the order of nature and, of course, the divine order, and would result in serious physical and/or spiritual trouble.
5. Put first things first in both the physical and spiritual order or suffer the consequences.
6. Our text studied in context emphasizes the fact that spiritual or heavenly things, being more important than material, physical or earthly things, must be the chief aim of our pursuit.

II. DISCUSSION

A. MT.6;33 STUDIED IN CONTEXT

1. The contextual background of Mt.6:33.
 - a. The disciple of Christ is a citizen of two different worlds at the same time, the earthly and the heavenly, with each striving for the mastery, thus a battle rages; for no man can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and

mammon. In this conflict the good becomes the enemy of the best.

b. In Mt.5 Jesus warns his disciples against the evils that assail them in their relationship to other men. In Mt.6 he warns against the subtler temptations in their relationships to God.

(1) If Satan cannot defile them through personal or social sins, he will attack them in the realm of personal righteousness, that which would rightly relate their lives to the will of God.

c. We can do right things in the wrong way and for the wrong purpose. The result is sin. Thus, in Mt.6, Jesus warns against such as he pictures three different things:

(1) The lure of man: Doing the right things in the wrong way – “to be seen of men,” Vv.1-18.

(2) The love of mammon: Laying up treasure for yourselves in the wrong place – on earth, instead of heaven, Vv.19-21.

(3) The loyalty to God: Seeking first things first – God and heavenly things must supersede all material things, Vv.24-34.

2. Mt.6:33 analyzed and explained.

a. What we are commanded to seek.

(1) “The kingdom of God,” – “the kingdom of him,” or “his kingdom.” Cf. Mt.3:2; 5:3; 7:21; 16:18,19; Jno.3:3-5; 18:36; Ac.2:36; Eph.5:5; 1Tim.6:15.

(a) Kingdom is from the Gr. term, denoting “royal power, dominion, rule.”

(b) The reign or rule of God’s will over man, or the reign of his will through Jesus Christ on the throne of David at the right hand of God in heaven, Ac.2:36; Rom.2:16; 1Tim.6:15; Eph.5:5; Heb.1:1-3.

(2) “And his righteousness,” the character of quality of being right or just; equity of character or act; or the righteousness that God demands. Cf. Jas.1:20

(a) His righteousness must displace self-righteousness, and/or all unrighteousness. Mt.5:6.

- (3) “Seek ye” is an imperative form and means that we on our part are “to desire to seek, to strive to obtain and enjoy that which is desired.
 - (a) It implies diligence and consideration.
 - (b) It implies patience and perseverance in our endeavor.
- (4) The pronoun “his” makes the treasure sought stand out as objective; both are God’s.
 - (a) God’s rule or will over man.
 - (b) The righteous life God demands.
- b. The order of importance, or its place in the order in which we are to seek these things: “Seek ye first”
 - (1) The idea is to be seeking, or to “go on seeking first”.
 - (2) “Seek first” is the command. Make these the earliest and primary objects of our attention. Give them preference above and beyond all else.
 - (3) “Seek first” in point of preference; in point of time when; in point of anxiety. Cf. Vv.30-34.
- c. The assurance connected with the command: “And all these things shall be added unto you.” The idea seemingly is:
 - (1) Without a doubt, He who seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness will seek all other things from the Father in the right way.
 - (2) Lenski’s note here is worth considering: “The adverb proton (first) does not imply that we may make earthly treasures the object of our seeking as long as we put them in second place. This would contradict all that Jesus has said. In the very next clause he tells us that ‘these things all shall be added unto us,’ thrown in, as it were, for good measure. On the other hand, ‘first’ or ‘in the first place’ does not imply that he who seeks the kingdom first will seek nothing more. After the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer comes the fourth. The promises given to prayer are entirely general, covering every need. He who seeks the kingdom, etc., first will seek all other things from the Father in the right way, by humble and

submissive prayer, without worry, and without a false estimate of these other things. Thus Christ's promise will be fulfilled; "these all" will be supplied to you, 1Kgs.3:11-14, etc.; 1Tim.4:8. See 3Jno.2.

- d. What, then, is to be the chief end and/or aim of Jesus' disciples according to this text and its context?
- (1) To glorify God, and to enjoy him and his blessings forever.
 - (2) The practical aim of the verse and its context from V.19 onward: Is to show the disciple of Jesus Christ how, and to enable him to be well pleasing to God, as he places the true values of life in their relative importance.
 - (3) By way of suggestion, it is to challenge all men to seek first God's will and way in the renunciation of that which perishes and fades away.
 - (4) By all means, loyalty to God must come first.
 - (5) There may be intermediate ends and objects that rightly call for our attention, but there is ONE that must never be forgotten, and must come first, or take first place in our desires, and be the chief object of our pursuits. V.33 tells us what it is!

B. ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS AND FURTHER APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURAL CONCEPT OF SEEKING AND PUTTING FIRST THINGS FIRST.

1. How can any disciple, who is physically and mentally capable, believe he or she is putting first things first when he or she is failing to meet the scriptural requirements of attendance and support of the work of the local church of which he or she is a member?
 - a. Attendance is required on the 1st day of the week:
 - (1) To eat the Lord's Supper, Ac.20:7; 1Cor.11:25.
 - (2) To lay by in store or give as prospered, 1Cor.16:2.
 - (3) These two are specified acts for a specific time.
 - b. Attendance is required in order to fulfill the obligations of edifying one another in performing the church's work

- of edification, Ac.20:28-32; 14:21,22; 1Th.4:11; Eph.4:11-16.
- c. Attendance is required in fulfilling our congregational worship in the song service, Eph.5:19; Col.3:16.
 - d. Attendance is required in order to obey Heb.10:23-25.
 - e. Attendance is required in such matters as:
 - (1) Selecting personal to serve the church:
 - (a) When it is charged with benevolent work such as that of Ac.6 and 1Tim.5.
 - (b) As elders and deacons (The principle is laid down in Ac.6.), Ac.14:21-23; Tit.1:5.
 - (2) Church discipline, 1Cor.5:1-5,9-13.
 - f. Attendance was required of the saints when the Apostles returned to report on their preaching journeys, Ac.14:24-27.
 - g. The collective work of the local church, in addition to its 1st day of the week worship, is threefold: the work of evangelism; the work of edification of the saints; the work of benevolence among needy saints.
 - (1) Each saint, each member of the local church, is responsible for his or her part in supporting this collective work.
 - (2) How can one fulfill what Mt.6:33 commands if one is guilty of absenteeism? (Absenteeism: Absence from duty or station when one is physically and mentally capable of being present, or when not hindered beyond one's control.)
2. Putting first things first means that among men Jesus Christ as Lord must come first.
- a. According to Col.1:15-18 he is to "have the pre-eminence."
 - (1) That is, the state of being pre-eminent; superiority in rank or order.
 - (2) In other words, he is "first" or above all others in all things. Cf. Mt.28:18; Mt.17:1-5; Heb.1:1-3; 3:1-6.
 - b. It must be duty and loyalty of Jesus Christ before self, and before all other, even relatives, Mt.10:34-39; 16:24-26; Lk.14:25-27; Ac.4:15-20; 5:27-29.
 - (1) "Hate" in the sense of "love less."

- c. Putting Jesus first means you must listen to him above the voice of:
 - (1) “Your” preacher, be he or she “Rev” “Rt. Rev” “Most Rt. Rev”, etc.
 - (2) Your father or mother.
 - (3) Any family member or close friend.
 - (4) King or civil ruler.
 - (5) Religious synod of conference.
 - (6) Moses, Pope or earthly priest.
- 3. Putting first things first, or keeping spiritual priorities straight, means putting the soul and its welfare before the physical body and its needs.
 - a. According to Mt.16:24-26 Jesus taught that the value of one soul is worth more than the whole world, and taught us to save it even at the expense of the body. Cf. Rev.2:10.
 - b. Who among us, who believes in God, would trade his soul for the world and its riches? But, in reality, this is what many are doing!
 - c. The simple realization of the truth taught by Jesus in Mt.16:26, the value of the soul, worth more than the whole world, would help us live better by putting the soul and its welfare first.
 - d. If you sell your soul for the world, no matter what you get for it, or how long you enjoy it, you will be the loser!
- 3. Putting first things first means putting spiritual duties before earthly pleasures.
 - a. Our main business (our vocation, our calling) is to be a Christian, fulfilling the various duties of being one. Cf. Rom.12:1,2; Eph.4:1; Eccl.12:13,14.
 - b. Innocent pleasures, hobbies, and recreational pastimes, which have a place, can wait; such as:
 - (1) Fishing.
 - (2) Hunting.
 - (3) Sporting events.
 - (4) Picnics.
 - (5) Visiting, etc.
 - c. It’s the disciples’ duty to attend to duty in the work and worship of the local church instead of being at ease in Zion. Cf. Amos 6:1.

4. Putting first things first involves putting the Bible and its study ahead of other literature; for it's the seed of the kingdom.
 - a. 1Pet.2:1,2; 2; 2Pet.1:2-4; 3:18; 2Tim.2:15; Hos.4:6.
 - b. Knowledge of God's word is necessary before:
 - (1) We can know right from wrong, or what sin is, Heb.5:12-14; Rom.3:20; Rom.7:7.
 - (2) We can enter heaven, Mt.7:21-23; 2Pet.1:5-11.
 - c. The Bible is the pasture of knowledge for the mind to graze upon. And our thinking is controlled by our reading or by what we put into our minds. Cf. Phil.4:8,9.
5. Putting first things first means putting obedience before sacrifice.
 - a. 1Sam.15:22.
 - b. 1Cor.13; Rom.12:1,2.
 - c. Bodily sacrifice without obedience is insufficient.
6. Putting first things first means the church of the kingdom comes first before all secular institutions. Cf. Mt.22:36,37.
 - a. This means and demands that over other institutions it is to be:
 - (1) First in point of time.
 - (2) First in importance.
 - (3) First in our loyalty.
 - (4) First in our affections.
 - (5) First in our thoughts.
 - b. First in our purposes. First take the Lord's part from our income then take care of other needs. Illustrate by the Lord's commands to the Israelites to bring forth the "first fruits".
 - (1) This divine principle in our day is all too often ignored or reversed by too many.
 - (2) As an excuse, some will say, "I'm in debt so far I have to reverse it. I just have to scrape up a little of what is left for the Lord."
 - (a) And this goes on and on indefinitely.
 - (b) They never get out of debt.
 - (c) And the Lord continues to be given the "left overs".
 - (3) Or they say, "Don't you think I am obligated to pay my debts?"

- (a) Certainly! But it isn't the Lord's fault that you always live above your means so that you never get out of debt!
- (b) So often our debts are not the result of an emergency, but rather our desire to have:
 - (1) More money for pleasures in this life and not the life to come.
 - (2) A better car; better clothes; better house and furnishings; this or that.
- c. Compare the value we put on the church with the value Jesus put on it, Ac.20:28; Eph.5:25.

III. CONCLUSION

1. Have you considered what:
 - a. Mt.6:33 commands?
 - b. Mt.6:33 means?
 - c. Is really involved in obeying Mt.6:33.
2. Have you given serious consideration to obeying Mt.6:33; If not, why not?
3. If not in the past, why not now?