

Priority

by Stephen Kaung

The sermon emphasizes the importance of setting the right priority in life, with God as the first priority, and provides examples of people who have set their priority right.

Scripture: Psalm 90:10, Matthew 6:33, Colossians 1:18, Revelation 1:17

Topics: "Godly Priorities", "Kingdom Living"

Description

Stephen Kaung preaches about the importance of setting God as the first priority in our lives, emphasizing the need to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. He highlights the challenges of modern life with its many demands and limited time, urging believers to make wise use of their time in alignment with God's will. Kaung shares examples from the Bible, such as Moses, Daniel, and a transformed banker, to illustrate the impact of setting the right priorities in life and the blessings that follow when God is given the first place.

Transcript

The following message was recorded in Richmond, Virginia, U.S.A. on August 3, 2003, and transcribed by Toronto Christ's Congregation. Scripture quotations are from the New Translation by J.N. Darby.

Revelation 1:17,18--And when I saw him I fell at his feet as dead; and he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one: and I became dead, and behold, I am living to the ages of ages, and have the keys of death and of hades.

Colossians 1:18-19--And he is the head of the body, the assembly, who is [the] beginning, firstborn from among the dead, that he might have the first place in all things: for in him all the fulness [of the Godhead] was pleased to dwell,

Matthew 6:33--But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

Let's have a word of prayer:

Dear Lord,

We want to thank thee for thy amazing love towards us. We thank thee for giving thyself, thy all to us. We thank thee that thou dost love us, and love us to the very end. Thou has not withheld anything from us.

Lord, we thank thee for all thy goodness and faithfulness. And as we gathered before thee this morning, Lord we just desire to hear thy voice. Speak to our hearts, reveal thyself to us afresh, draw us that we may run after thee. Thou knowest each one of us, thou knowest where we are, thou knowest what we need. So Lord, do show thy mercy to us this morning. May thy name be exalted. We ask in thy precious name. Amen.

In the three passages that we have just read, you'll notice there is one word that happens in each of these passages. And that's the word "first". So the burden that the Lord has laid upon my heart is on this matter of priority. First place.

We live a very complex and complicated life on earth. Modern life is very complicated. There are so many things that we must do. There are great demands upon our time. And yet, our time is so limited. We have only twenty-four hours a day. And not only that, but even our lifespan is so short.

Moses, the man of God, said in Psalm 90:10 "Our days are threescore and ten (seventy); and if, by reason of strength, we may get to fourscore (eighty), but our pride is labour and vanity, soon we will cut off and we fly away." Now, that is how short our life is. Now even though with modern hygiene, people seem to be able to live a little longer. But on the other hand, you'll find it is being counter-balanced by the perplexity and the complexity of life, of modern life. You know those who lived in early days, their lives were much easier. There were less demands, less interests. They had plenty of time as it were, to meditate. But modern life is so pressing, so full that you hardly have the time to think. Now when we are faced with all these problems and yet we remember that our life and our time are given by God and one day we have to be before the Lord and answer "How do we use His gifts?" Whether we have used them wisely or whether we have used them foolishly.

Moses prayed, "Lord, teach us to number our days." In other words, we need to have the wisdom to know how to spend our time. To spend it in such a way that it may be counted in eternity. We may live seventy years, eighty years, or more. But how many days are really counted by God? And that's a question we need to ask ourselves. How do we use our time wisely according to the will of God? One day, when we shall appear before him, how many days of our lives are counted and how many days are just waste? This matter of priority becomes a very real, pressing question to every one of us. Not just to those of age, but even for those who are beginning in their lives.

Now of course, before we are saved, the god of this world has blinded our eyes, he has darkened our mind. So during those days, our priority of life was all distorted. We could not see very far. All we can see is this life, this world, this limited time. And we find that during those days our priority was set on the things of this world. How could we get the most of it? How could we enjoy everything that the world could give us? How could we satisfy, gratify ourselves? We were self-centred, we lived for ourselves, and we want the best of everything during this short lifetime. Now that's where we were.

I remember a real story. Once there lived a couple. The wife was a devout Christian but her husband was not a believer. And of course, the wife loved her husband. So she tried her very best to persuade her husband to turn to the Lord, but was of no avail. She didn't know what to do, so she prayed. And the Lord gave her wisdom. Beginning from that time onward, she began to treat her husband so royally. She gave everything of the best to her husband. When they ate, she always gave her husband the best food. And in everything she always gave the best to her husband. And while (she did it for a while) her husband began to wonder, "Now why is it that you treat me this way?" So one day her husband asked her, "Now why is it

that you always give me the best?" "Well," the wife said, "because that's all you can get. Your life is just for this world. You have no future. You have no hope. You have--nothing. So I must give you everything while you can have them because if you don't, then you missed." And you know that word touched his heart and finally the husband came to the Lord.

So, brothers and sisters, if you have only this world to enjoy, my advice will be: Enjoy to the uttermost. Eat and drink for tomorrow you die. You have nothing else. But unfortunately it is not true. Our life here is just on probation. God gives us a certain amount of days, of years. We are on probation and God wants to see how well, how wisely or how foolishly we use our time because our time today is closely related to eternity. The way you spend your days today decides your future, your eternity. So it is not something that we can just throw away unwisely. Brothers and sisters, we who have been saved by his grace, we who are God's children, certainly, we should know better. How should we spend our days? Do we have a principle that governs us? How do we use our times? How do we divide our times?

We need the guidance. And as you go to the word of God, you find that one of the names of God is "I am the First". You know "I am the First" is God's name. His name is the first. But it is not just a vain name because that name represents a reality. He is the first. He is not only the first in creation. He is the first in redemption. He is the first in love. He is the first in giving. He is the first of everything. It's not just a name, it's a reality. In other words, he is the first of your life. Now is it true with us? Can you say that God is the first in your life? Are there many other things that seem to occupy the first place and God is somewhere at the last? That shouldn't be, brothers and sisters--he is the first. It is the will of God that his beloved Son should have the first place in all things. Not only the first place in creation (and that's the reason why all creation was created in him, by him and for him), He's the first in redemption, he's the head of the body of Christ, the firstborn from among the dead, the beginning of the church and he has the first place in your life. That's God's purpose. God's purpose is that Christ will have the first place in your life. And, is it true in your life? God's word says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Now in our seeking, are we like those who have no heavenly Father? Those who are anxious about what to eat, what to drink and what to be clothed with? These are the necessities of life. And we need all these things, but are we so anxious of what to eat, what to drink and what to be clothed with as if we have nobody to take care of us? Where is our heavenly Father? He knows what we need and his command is, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." If your priority is right, "all these things shall be added to you." They will follow.

So, brothers and sisters, this matter of priority is something that we need to decide at the very beginning of our Christian life. (Of course, it is not too late if you haven't done that and you have already been a Christian for a number of years. But it's never too late.) We need to set our priority as to what we really see is the most important in our life. You know, this life is so short. And our days are so restricted. Only twenty-four hours. There are many necessities. There are many demands. There are many legitimate needs. We need to have rest--eight hours of sleep. We need to work--maybe eight hours of work. And now you see modern life is such that maybe you will be asked to work ten hours instead of eight hours. And you need to eat--maybe two hours. So there's not much left. And you have a family to take care of. You have children. Or, those in school, you have lessons and you have many other extra-curricular activities. And of course, you need recreation; you cannot be on detention all the time. So you find that you are crowded with all these demands and every demand seems to want your full time and your full strength. Now, what are you going to do?

You know our enemy is very wise. He is that old serpent. So when Moses came to Egypt and told Pharaoh, "God said, 'Let my people go, that they may serve me.'" And what was Pharaoh's reaction? Now he already put these children of Israel to hard labours, making bricks, build cities for him. But when Moses said, "God said, 'Let my people go, that they may serve me.'", what did Pharaoh say? Pharaoh said, "These people have too much time. Free time for themselves. That's why they want to go and worship. So, increase their labour. They have to produce the right amount of bricks but don't give them the straw. Let them go and find the straw." In other words, if you make them fully occupied, they will think nothing of spiritual. Everything will be just for this life--physical. Nothing spiritual. That is what the enemy says. And that is what the enemy has been doing and that is what the enemy is doing today. Everybody who is in work complains that formerly there are only eight hours of work; now you have to work ten hours, maybe twelve hours. If not, you are fired. Brothers and sisters, that's the old trick of the enemy.

So we are faced with all these problems. On the one hand, we are faced with the necessities of life. On the other hand, you find the enemy is trying very hard to take away all your time so that you will have no time to think about God, no time to worship, no time to read your bible, no time to pray, you will have no time to meet. Now what are we going to do under that kind of circumstances? The only solution is: You need to set your priority. If you do not have a priority as if everything as equally important, you will know what will happen? You will just be driven by outward circumstances. When this demand comes, then you'll go for it, and it begins to consume your time and energy until you are exhausted. And then another demand comes. So in other words, you have no life principle. You have no purpose in life. You are just being swayed and changed by the outside powers and outside forces. Now of course you don't like to live that kind of life; having no meaning, no purpose, just passively driven by your outward demands, outward circumstances. No meaning in life. Of course, you don't want to do that. But if you set a wrong priority, then you will be going in a wrong direction.

Think of Lot. He came out of Ur of Chaldea with his uncle, Abraham. He travelled with Abraham. He was blessed by God with Abraham. But then, he set his wrong priority. He wanted the world. He was in Egypt once and whatever is like Egypt, that attracted him. And that plain, in Sodom and Gomorrah was like Egypt. So he makes his choice. He moved his tent closer and closer until finally he stayed in the city of Sodom. And this wrong priority led him to a wrong end. Pitiful end. The right priority sets you on the right path, gives you a right living. So, dear brothers and sisters, it is extremely important that we set our priority and set it right. We need to make a choice. When all the demands of life (not to say that in illegitimate demands, there are many legitimate demands upon us), now when we are crowded with all these demands pressing upon us, we have to make a choice. We cannot treat everything equally. We don't have the energy; we don't have the time because everything demands our all. What are we going to do? We have to make the right choice. That is to say, what do we consider as the most important in our life? Who do we consider should have the first place in our life? And that should be the principle that will decide all the rest of these. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. In other words, if you set the right priority, all the other things will fall in. You will find that everything will be taken care of that needs to be taken care of. Don't you believe that?

What is your priority? Strictly speaking as God's people, there is only one priority that we can set. What else can you set? Can you say that my own life is most important? Your life is not yours. You are redeemed; you belong to someone else--to the Lord. If you say, "My family is my first priority. Everything has to be governed by my family. When my family demands, I give it all."--now is that right priority? Or even you say, "My church is the first priority, I give everything to the church."--is that right? And you

neglect your family; neglect your work--of course not. Now who should be your first priority? The word of God is so clear. God is the first. God's will is that his Son has the first place. His command is, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and if we love him, we keep his commandments. So, brothers and sisters, what about you? What is your priority? What is the principle of your life? What is the guide to the use of your time? It's not just a matter of the amount of time; it is also a matter of the quality of time. Now how do you set your priority?

You remember Moses in Hebrews chapter 11? We are told that Moses, when he grew up, he grew up in Egyptian palace, he was a prince there, adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. And when he became great--now great in two senses--one sense is he's grown up, he was forty years old, other sense is, according to tradition, that he became a great general in Egypt. He became great. But then, one day, he had to make a choice. He had to set his priority right. Was he going to just enjoy all the riches of Egypt? He might be the Pharaoh one day. Was he to seek all the pleasures of sins that Egypt could give? Or would he rather choose suffering with God's people--the reproaches of Christ? He had to make a choice. What was his priority? And he made the right choice. He would rather forsake all the riches and pleasures of Egypt. He choose the sufferings, the reproach of Christ, for he had seen the invisible--the unseen. Brothers and sisters, is the visible and seen all that we can see? Do we see the invisible--the unseen?

Think of Daniel. In his teens, he was taken as a hostage to a foreign country. And yet he was unexpectedly given the best opportunity that any young person can ever dream of. He was chosen to be educated, to be nourished for three years that he might stand before Pharaoh. What an opportunity! But this teenager, he decided in his heart, he purposed a purpose--he would not be polluted with the wine and the food of Egypt. He wanted to keep himself pure for God. What a choice! It wasn't easy because he was not free, but he had faith. And God answered his faith. And the result was: God gave him great wisdom, understanding and what a future he had--not for himself, for the glory of God. Brothers and sisters--that's Daniel.

I know a brother. He was a banker--not only a banker, but he was one of the greatest fortune-tellers in China. He became a millionaire. He was a wicked man. But one day the Lord got hold of him and turned it completely around. He used to smoke seventy cigarettes a day--just one match. When he was eating, his servant would hold the cigarette for him. But on the day he believed in the Lord Jesus, that was gone. He put a bible on his desk in the office. Whenever people came in, he would talk to them about the Lord. He went to the meeting not only on Sunday, but on other days--for prayer, for bible study, for different things. And whenever there was a meeting, he would have no entertainment. You know, a banker entertaining every evening--entertained by people or entertaining people. But after he believed the Lord, he made a point. If there was meeting, no entertainment. So of course, his fellow bankers were surprised, and said, "Now, people worship only on Sunday. Now why is it that you worship on Monday, you worship on Wednesday, you worship on Friday? Why did you do that?" "Well," he said, "according to the Chinese (now, you need to be Chinese to understand that), the way we call every day is 'worship one', 'worship two', 'worship three', 'worship four', 'worship five', 'worship six', 'worship Sunday'. So, everyday is worship. That's Chinese. Li bài tian, li bài yì, li bài èr, li bài. Worship!" "So," he said, "worship everyday!" Brothers and sisters, a priority was set, and by the grace of God, he kept to it. Brothers and sisters, how important it is that you have your right priority. Otherwise your life will be just a drifting--a waste. What a pity.

Forgive me to say a few words to young people who are still in school. Maybe in high school, maybe in college. By the grace of God, he saved me when I was in high school. And when I went to college, I was not as fortunate as many brothers and sisters, young people today--they have spiritual companions. Now,

by the way, when you choose your college, how do you choose your college? Is there a priority when you choose where to go? Is it only the best college you could go that makes the criteria?

Have you ever thought if you go there, is there a group of believers there that you can fellowship with? Are you thinking more of your spiritual needs? Or do you just neglect all these things? Now, this is a point you need to remember. Now, I didn't choose my college, because my father chose for me. I was sixteen then and in China, you know, we are taught to obey the parents. I didn't want to go, but he wanted me to go. But when I went there, I discovered the whole atmosphere was so hostile to my Christian life.

It was supposed to be a Christian college. But unfortunately, even many of the professors, from this country, missionaries, they did not believe the bible; they did not believe Jesus is the Son of God. I was shocked. So I withdrew myself, I was alone. My only comfort and strength was everyday I knelt before the Lord, read my bible and prayed. I was in the dormitory--there are others in the same room, but I don't care. I knelt there, read my bible and prayed. That was my only lifeline, to maintain me before the Lord.

I loved to study and I felt as a student, "What is my priority? My priority is to live for God, to glorify him. I need to study well--not for my own sake, nor for my parent's sake, but for the glory of God." So that is my priority. But, in God's arrangement, when I was a junior in college, the Lord began to raise up a company of believers. And even though I was so young, I was responsible for that meeting. And the demand of time upon me was so great. When the Lord began to gather us in that city, we were under great persecution.

Not from the world--from the Christian world. And I, in a sense was put in responsibility. I spent lots of time--not only in the meetings, visiting--because we were under great persecution it took lots of my time. Just to tell you how faithful God was: I had almost no time to study. I spent all my time in serving the Lord. But I always remember that I have to study for the glory of God. And you know what happened? When I put God first, he repaid me a hundred-fold. Often times when I came back late at night--I was trying to study, lying on my bed with my books and I fell asleep.

At midnight my mother would get there and cover me. But the Lord multiplied a hundred-fold. When I had time to study, I prayed, "Lord, I have even no time to cover the whole book. Give me wisdom." And the Lord answered me, and every time I would say [give me wisdom] in an examination, the answers were there. Brothers and sisters, I say this to encourage you young people. Even when you are a student, don't think that we are just students and our priority is study. Our priority is that we get all and get everything the best.

It is for the Lord, yes. Not even for ourselves--for the Lord. So brothers and sisters, seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Now just a word of warning--because if you think, "Well, that's fine. Then I won't study anymore. I'll just go to meetings and the Lord will give me a hundred-fold."--you try it, and you'll fail. It's a matter of your heart. It's a matter of priority. It's a matter of what the Lord has ordered in your life.

What is your priority? When demands come, how do you decide? Do you really put God first? Or yourself first? Or your family first? Or even your church first? Who gets the priority? Who has the best of your time? Who decides which is more important than the others? And brothers and sisters, if we put God first, all these things shall be added unto you. Now, how are you going to go about it? This matter of setting priority is not a legalistic thing. It is not a decision that you make legalistically or mechanically.

No. It is a spiritual exercise. In other words, you need to exercise before the Lord on this matter of priority. You need to go to the Lord and lay this matter of your life, your time before the Lord. Lay this matter of all the demands of your life before the Lord and ask the Lord to give you an understanding from above. In other words, that the Lord may show you who he is. What is his heart? What does he want you to do? What is his will for you? And, if you can see that he is the first, he should have the first place in your life and he wants you to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, then, as your heart is moved by who he is, and what he is, make your decision.

Give him the priority. It's a spiritual exercise. And after you have given him the priority, then you ask him to give you wisdom as to how to distribute your times. You have a work to do--it is for the glory of God. You have a family to take care of--it is for the glory of God. You have lessons to study--it is for the glory of God. You need recreation--it is for the glory of God. You need to assemble with the saints--it is for the glory of the Lord. Brothers and sisters, you lay these things before the Lord and ask the Lord to give you wisdom to distribute your time.

It may change from time to time; but as the Lord leads you, then, if you set your priority right, then the Holy Spirit will, in your daily life, lead you and guide you into all truth. In other words, as you go in your daily life, as demands begin to come to you, as you begin to be faced with different demands and you have only this time, what are you going to do? To what demand will you use your time? Brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit--he will bring to your mind, apply the principle that you have set and he will work it out in the distribution of your time.

It is a spiritual thing. You know, it is not mechanical or technical. And, when you are daily guided by the Spirit according to the principle that God has set in your life, brothers and sisters, your spiritual life will grow. You will be nourished and you'll find in your decisions God is honoured. Now it is true, your flesh may suffer. It is true; sometimes you may be even misunderstood. But thank God, he is with you and that's the most important thing. So, brothers and sisters, do not just let your life drift.

Your life needs to be governed by an inward principle. May the Lord help you to set your priority right as early as possible. Now often times, we who are older, regret that we do not see, do not set our priority early enough and lots of our times are wasted, will not be counted before God--lost forever. May every moment count in the eyes of God. God bless you.

Dear Lord, our life is yours. Our time is yours. Give us wisdom to set our priority right. And guide and lead us throughout our life that we may walk in thy will. Bless thy people. Keep thy people. We ask in thy precious name. Amen.

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