

The Priority of the Kingdom

by T. Austin-Sparks

Seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness brings freedom from anxiety and worry, and allows us to live a life of rest and prosperity under God's sovereign rule.

Scripture: Psalm 97:2, Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 5:1-2, Matthew 6:25, Matthew 6:27-28, Matthew 6:31, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 7:7-8, Philippians 4:6-7

Topics: "Overcoming Anxiety", "Sovereignty Of God"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the importance of prioritizing God's sovereign rule in our lives, as articulated in Matthew 6:33. He explains that seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness is not a passive act but a deliberate arrangement of life that leads to heart rest and freedom from anxiety. The sermon highlights that true peace comes from aligning our interests with God's, rather than succumbing to the burdens of worry and self-interest. Sparks encourages believers to actively seek God's rule in every aspect of their lives, assuring them that when they do, all their needs will be met. This teaching serves as a reminder that God's sovereignty is essential for a fulfilling and anxiety-free life.

Transcript

"Be not anxious... which of you by being anxious... why are ye anxious? ...Be not therefore anxious... But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:25,27,28,31,33).

Let us remind ourselves once again, and keep it clearly before us, that the fundamental meaning of the word which has been translated into our English word 'kingdom' is SOVEREIGN RULE. It will then immediately be apparent that this verse 33 that we have read takes on new meaning and value: 'Seek ye first the sovereign rule of God, and then it follows that all these things will be added.'

You note the context. This verse is found right in the heart of what has come to be called 'the sermon on the mount', which covers three whole chapters, 5, 6 and 7 - one hundred and eleven verses. This is the first of five discourses by the Lord recorded by Matthew. You will notice, further, that what is here was given primarily to His disciples, who were the nucleus of this sovereignty, this rule, this Kingdom. "Seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain: and when he had sat down, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth and taught them" (Matt. 5:1,2): so that it is evident that this has to do with those who are immediately and essentially within the compass and meaning of this sovereign rule. Dr. Campbell Morgan calls this section: 'Jesus the King, His Propaganda and Enunciating of Laws'. It is the enunciation

of the laws of the King and His Kingdom, of the Ruler and His rule.

THE LAW OF HEART REST UNDER THE SOVEREIGN RULE OF GOD

Here, then, is a law of God's sovereign rule: "Seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." We see, from the context, that it has to do with fretful preoccupation over ways and means in this life, especially the cares of tomorrow - incidentally getting right to the root of many a nervous breakdown, of a good deal of neurosis. But we shall not attempt to deal with that. We are enunciating a law, a law of the sovereign rule, which stands over against this constantly reiterated word - anxious, anxious, anxious. It is therefore the law of heart rest under the sovereign rule of God - heart rest because you are in the Kingdom. Our mentality at once visualises a sphere, a realm; but that comes second. Because you are within the sovereign government of God, "all these things" are there.

A POSITIVE LAW

But note - it is not a passive law. The Lord Jesus does not say, here or anywhere else, what kindly people often say - 'Oh, don't worry, the Lord will take care of you, and will look after that. It will all come out all right.' He no more says that than He would say, on the other hand: 'Substitute an insurance society for God and all is taken care of.' Nor, to bring it into the realm of religion, does He say: 'Hand it over to the priest, and he will take care of that'; or: 'Hand it over to the church, and rid yourself of all responsibility.' I put it in that way, in order that we may get right at what He does say. Somehow or other, we must get to the real heart of this thing, the meaning of this, and so we strip off any mistaken or false ideas, and any wrong courses. There are many people who think that, if only they could adopt some policy (insurance or otherwise!), or some expedient, by which responsibility and liability could be taken off their own shoulders and placed for them somewhere else, they would come to rest - and it does not work that way. You may be the most heavily insured person in creation, and still be the most anxious person, the most worried, the most fretful. There is no guarantee of heart rest along the lines of shelving of responsibility, nor along the line of a false passivity which says, 'Don't worry, it will all come out all right.' The law is not passive.

But notice - it IS positive. The Lord does not say, 'Oh, don't worry.' He says, 'Seek first...' The law is a very positive one, you see. 'Seek first...' and then responsibility will be taken, then the other will be looked after. 'Seek ye first the sovereign rule, the government, of God, and His righteousness.' It is the positive principle of viewing everything in the light of how it serves God's rule. If you will only do that, you come into the good that is here. Our own interests come second or last. His interests come first, and when life is arranged on that basis - ARRANGED on that basis - and kept on that basis, then the other follows; God looks after the other things.

DELIBERATE ARRANGEMENT OF LIFE

I said, when life is ARRANGED on that basis. The fact is that it takes some of us a long time to get life on to that basis. It is only after having lived a long time that we begin to re-arrange life in this way. Well, better late than never! But here is a word for young people and for young Christians - especially to young people who are in a position to arrange their lives in any way. Perhaps you have just started married life together, or are contemplating doing so. Now is the time to arrange it on this principle of the sovereign rule. Now is your opportunity to make it quite unnecessary in after years either to undo much or to regret much. All these laws of the sovereign rule are very practical, as you see, and this is a very practical one. Where shall we live? What kind of a home shall we have? These are practical questions. You must arrange everything on this principle. The thing that matters and governs, and in relation to which everything now

has to be arranged, is: How does this serve the interests of the sovereign rule of God?

Put that first, and you will escape many a tragedy, such as we see in many places. Oh, a nice house and a nice home, maybe, but altogether out of relation to the interests of the Lord, both in distance and in other ways. It is going to be an incubus, a hindrance and a limitation; the things of the Lord are going to be made to suffer. And there are many, many spiritual tragedies - lives that have lost out with the Lord, both in spiritual measure and in usefulness to Him, both in service and in a related way in His Church; and so we could spread it out. The whole matter of getting on in the world, of success or ambition - what a range this covers! Now the law and principle of this rule of Heaven is that life must be arranged in the first place in relation to God's interests and God's rule. This must come first, and if it is, you may rest assured that God will look after your interests. You will certainly not suffer in the long run. God will be true to His side of the undertaking.

And then there is the maintaining of the arrangement, the remaining on that basis. It is so easy to be drawn out by a thousand and one things. In fine points, all the way along, the enemy is trying somehow or other to divert, to draw away, to put something in that takes the place of the interests of the Lord. This is a serious and earnest business, calling for all diligence and watchfulness and steadfastness. It is, as I have said, not passive by any means. It will not just happen willy-nilly. "SEEK ye first..."

SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM

Now that word 'seek' is emphatic. "Seek, and ye shall find", said the Lord elsewhere, "for... he that seeketh findeth" (Matt. 7:7,8). Here is the picture of someone applying themselves with diligence. SEEK: set yourself upon this thing, make it your business and keep at it. Seek FIRST - and keep on seeking first - the sovereign rule of God. Take the alternative course - put your own affairs and interests first - and the inference is perfectly clear though the Lord does not say so explicitly. For He is saying: 'You are anxious. WHY are you anxious?' He is dealing with people who are 'up against things', and the inference is that, if you adopt the alternative of putting your own interests first, then you must take responsibility for the consequences. You have to reckon with life without the sovereign rule of God. It is a terrible thing never to be able to appeal in the court of God, never to find that the Lord is really working everything for good, never to know that there is no need at all to be anxious. Take the burden, carry the weight yourself, work life out yourself, and sooner or later you will come up against some tremendous situation with which you cannot cope, and that is the alternative which many have so grievously found.

"BUT" - on that word there is a turnover, a turn round, a change of position - "BUT seek ye first..." It is just the question of God's sovereign rule in our affairs, in our life, which we may know and enjoy and prove and find to be real. It is a wonderful thing at long last to find that it has been real, even when we thought that it was not working that way, and that God was not at work in things in our interest, to find at long last that where He seemed to be least active He still had the situation in hand. Yes - to live long enough with God to be able to look back upon situations which at the time seemed to deny that the Lord was governing, was ruling, and to be able to see that those were the very things which worked out to good. It is true. Perhaps you who read these words find yourself today in a situation where it is difficult to trace the sovereign hand of God; but God's word stands and God's undertaking is sure. He says: 'You put first My interests, My rule, and I will look after the rest - all these things shall be added'.

Let us make sure that this has got home. We have to make this a personal matter - for anxiety, is a personal matter, is it not? It is OUR anxiety, it is OUR troubles and bothers, it is OUR complications and

difficulties. It is all just OURS. May it not be that a lot of it is unnecessary? - unnecessary because, as we go here or there, proceed on some errand, some purpose, to transact something, or carry out some project we do not stop to ask: 'Now, what interest of the Lord can be served in this?' Impulse, whim, fleshly desire - what WE would like - all these things arise and govern the course of our lives, and the Lord says, 'Stop! The first thing is: Where do I come in? How are My interests going to be served?' Perhaps that might seem very exacting, even legal; but it is not so - it is the way into this beneficent rule of God.

'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.' Here are two things. First the kingdom - the sovereign rule of God. Seek ye first, in other words, that which relates to God's place in life: that is, His sovereign rule. He is Lord, He is Sovereign: then seek first that which relates to His place. It sounds very simple and elementary, but God's place is a most important thing. What place has God in this? Where does He come in? His place is as Sovereign. His sovereign rule is His right.

SEEK FIRST HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

And then His righteousness - that which relates to God's character. Seek ye first that which is like God - God-like. The whole Bible is taken up with this matter of righteousness and unrighteousness, and righteousness is what God is like, what belongs to God. "Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of his throne" (Ps. 97:2). Unrighteousness is that which is against God, against which prophet and seer pronounce God's displeasure and God's wrath. So when we are told that what we are to seek, as a first priority, is (1) His rightful place in our lives, and (2) that which is God-like, we are getting to the very heart of this law. It means that you and I are to seek in the first place and at all times to be Christ-like, God-like - which is only an extension of 'godly'; to bring the likeness, the nature and character of God into the situation; to seek that there shall be found here some expression of what God is like as He has been revealed in Jesus Christ. It means that it is our first and primary business to see to it that our home shall be a place where God is known in truth, a place characterized by what God is like; and it means that all our interests are to bring Him, as to what He truly is, into every situation in life.

That is not exaggerating this word. His righteousness, His character, His likeness, what He is in Himself: make it your business to bring THAT in first, and then you find the Lord right there in all His sovereign rule on your behalf. Forgive the simplicity of this, but we are accustomed to quoting this passage so glibly - 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' Yes, but what does it mean? It is applied teaching, and that is one reason why the Lord Jesus kept it for the disciples. It is sheer nonsense to call upon unsaved men to live up to the Sermon on the Mount. This is not a rule of life for the unconverted. It is an impossible thing to present to them. This is a practical basis of everyday life for the children of the Kingdom.

GOD'S KINGDOM AGAINST THE ENEMY'S KINGDOM

But there is always lurking in the near vicinity another kingdom, another government, another rule, another god, and the object of that other kingdom is to bring the people of God into servitude, into bondage, to hold them in toilsome labour. Your mind will have immediately darted back to Egypt. You remember that it says that ISRAEL was in Egypt. Think for a moment. Isra-el - a prince with God. The nation were the sons of Israel, and they were in bondage, in servitude, in toilsome, wearisome labour in Egypt. It is a picture. The laws of the rule of God are intended for our emancipation, our deliverance, our freedom, our rest, our prosperity, and there is the shadow of this other rule always near. Not satisfied with bringing the poor world under its abominable rule, it seeks above all things to impinge upon the sons of God and to bring

them into toilsome bondage.

Many, many a child of God is there, in the toils of anxiety, in the awful grip of this other kingdom that would rob God of His glory in His people, that would malign God in the very looks of His children - anxious, burdened, worried, fretful - sons of God! What a contradiction! It seems that some children of God have entered into a terrible conspiracy with themselves never to smile, afraid that they would be giving away some spirituality. It is a very grievous matter. God's thought for His people is that they shall be an emancipated and free people, and that does not only mean freedom from judgment and condemnation and the penalty of sin, but freedom from this tyranny of the anxious heart and melancholy face.

You see what the Devil is after. This law of the sovereignty is of deep, deep meaning and far-reaching effect. This other is another kingdom, another rule, so different. One of the chief objects of that other kingdom and rule is to bring God's own blood-bought children into anxious care, to deny the very redemption which God has wrought for them in Christ. And so, in order to defeat the Devil himself, to destroy the power of his rule - 'Seek ye first the sovereign rule of God, and His righteousness', and He will take responsibility and relieve you of your unnecessary care. Is that practical? Is that important? Well, Jesus came to bring in this Kingdom - this rule and this regime - and to undo the other kingdom.

So it comes surely with the backing of tremendous meaning: 'Seek ye first - give priority to - the sovereign rule of God, and His righteousness - His character, nature - and all these things shall be added unto you.'

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