

SEEKING GOD'S KINGDOM

The two things most of us complain about NOT having enough is time and money. Most of us think that there are just not enough hours in a day to get everything done that we want or need to do. "Hurry, hurry, rush, rush" seems to describe today's society. On the other hand, it may seem that we have too many days before the end of the month when the next paycheck arrives. If this is our problem, then it is likely that the cause is that we have not properly focused and set our priorities correctly. One of the reasons that we don't have enough time in a day could be that we are trying to do too many things. There are many things that need to be done and so many things seem so urgent that they just can't wait. We find ourselves caught up in reacting to urgent pressures and, consequently, neglect the important things around us.

We can also get caught up in focusing on things and spend too much time on accumulating "stuff." Imagine a group of five-year-old children playing in a room full of toys. Four of them have a ball and are tossing it around, another child has all the rest of the toys over to one side of the room, guarding them so that the others can't play with them. At the end of the day, all the children go home with their parents. Which of the children had a more fulfilling day? At the end of the day did it really matter who had the most toys?

We live in a material world and in a spiritual world. The material seems to be more real than the spiritual; however, we know that the material things will pass away and only the spiritual will remain. *We would do well to consider that in the eternal spiritual realm, neither time nor material things have any significance.* While Jesus did not condemn the possession of material things, He did speak strongly against putting our trust in possessions rather than in God. He also warned that the mere possession of material goods and money makes it very difficult to not trust in these things.

One day Jesus was teaching a larger multitude of His followers about the principles of the Kingdom of God. He had just warned about the leaven of the Pharisees. He had told them that everything anyone does will be revealed one day. He had assured the people of God's love and care for them. He had warned them about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and had assured them that the Holy Spirit would be a helper and guide to

those who follow Him. In the midst of these profound truths, Jesus was interrupted by a man in the crowd.

LUKE 12:13-15 Concern over material things can literally absorb you so that you cannot concentrate on anything else. I wonder how many families have been split over arguments about who is going to get Aunt Sally's dinner plates or Poppa's rocking chair. Such concerns have been going on for a long time. Here we see the case of two brothers who could not agree how their inheritance was going to be divided. One of the brothers was in the crowd as Jesus taught the greatest sermon that has ever been delivered: the Sermon on the Mount. Right in the middle of this discourse on the Secrets of a Happy Life, this man, who had been not paying any attention to what Jesus was saying, blurted out this request that Jesus should tell his brother how to divide the inheritance. The Jewish law was quite explicit about how the division was to be done and disputes were normally handled by the rabbis. Jesus answered the man with a question: ". . . who appointed Me arbiter between you (and your brother)?" In other words, Jesus said, "That is not My job!" I wonder, do we ask God to do things that He simply refuses to get involved with? When we come to God with our petitions, are we guilty of concentrating on the petty and the unimportant rather than on things eternal? The law was clear and others (rabbis) had been appointed to deal with such matters. What the man needed was help in being able to accept the decision of the rabbis and to be able to overlook the wrong (if any) done by his brother so that he could still love him as he should. If he had asked Jesus how to deal with such matters, then I would guess he would have received a different response. As it was, Jesus took the man's preoccupation with materialism as an example of something to avoid. He said, "Take heed!" or watch out. It is so easy to get caught up in wanting things and material desires and lose focus of the important things in life. As Jesus said, "Life is more than the things you own."

LUKE 12:16-21 To illustrate the folly of materialism and the greed that follows such materialism, Jesus told the crowd a parable which has come to be known as the Parable of the Rich Fool. This was about the farmer who had been blessed so much there was not room enough to receive it could not figure out what to do with all

the harvest, so he tore down his old barns and built bigger ones to store the abundance. He then thought that he had it made and said to himself, "Take it easy; eat, drink and be merry." However, he did not live to enjoy all that ease that he thought he had and Jesus said that was what awaited all who were rich toward themselves but not rich toward God. This man focused on his body but not on his soul, focused on time but neglected eternity, and focused on self but ignored God.

It is not only the rich who have problem with concentrating all their energies on materialism while ignoring the spiritual. It is possible to not have much material wealth and still not be rich toward God. Many people go through life and develop a grasping, grabbing spirit, thinking only of themselves. Many try to get all they can and can all they get. The difference between the rich and the not-so-rich is that one group is more successful in their grasping and grabbing than the other group, but they both can have the same spirit.

What does it mean to be rich toward God? What is it that you depend upon as your source is another way to ask the question. Paul, in Phillipians 4:19 wrote: "For my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

LUKE 12:22-30 Jesus then told His disciples the conclusion that is to be drawn from the parable. He said, "Take no thought . ." Some people find themselves totally consumed with clothes, what to wear, the latest fashions, the right brand, etc. Others are caught up the same way in the cars they drive. They want their cars and their clothes to make a statement about themselves and to me these things do make a statement. They say, "Shallow, facade, empty, what you see is all there is!" In the process these people are being rich toward themselves but not rich toward God. They are tearing down their old barns and building new ones. The other triviality that Jesus mentioned that people seem to major on is what food to eat. I don't know if He had in mind being health conscious in choosing a healthy diet by avoiding food high in fat, sugar, and salt or if He meant the constant pursuit of the finest restaurants and the most exotic cuisine. I suspect that the thrust of His concern was with materialism in general. Such preoccupation and anxiety diverts our attention from what is really important in life. There is a song that was popular several years ago entitled, The Cat's in the Cradle which tells the story of a father who was so caught up in his job that he

never had time for his son. The little boy always wanted his dad to do something with him, but he put it off until later. We see this scene being played out in the majority of American homes with not only the fathers but also with the mothers--so many of them work. They have to have more income because their lifestyle--what they wear and what they eat--has become a higher priority item than the welfare and well being of their children. One of the problems with letting materialism or fame or power or even our children become the top priority in our lives is that these prevent us from having a well balanced and well-ordered life. Part of the Good News of the Gospel that Jesus proclaimed is that if you get the Number One Priority right, then the rest of life will be properly ordered and put into the right perspective.

LUKE 12:31-34 Our Number One Priority in life is to be our relationship with God. The Kingdom of God is quite simply where and when God is King. Paul put it this way, "The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteous, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." When we let God be sovereign in our lives the out-come is righteousness (a right relationship with God), peace (the inner struggle of our trying to have everything our way is gone), and joy (sense of exhilaration of having it all together). One of the things that many people fail to realize is that God is totally for us. He is on our side and not only wants what is best for us, He also knows what is best for us. Therefore, we should not be afraid to surrender our very lives to Him. Jesus said, "Fear not, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."

Jesus taught a truth that could be summarized as "The more you have the more you want." He advised, to get rid of all that excess baggage. It turns out that what you possess winds up possessing you. You have to mow it, paint it, feed it or fix it. Jesus said that if we really should be accumulating something for the future; however, we need to realize that the real future is ETERNITY. The way we increase our bank account in heaven is by helping others and being kind and forgiving of others. These things are treasures that can't depreciate in value and things that can't be stolen.