

FIRST THINGS FIRST

NO. 1864

AN ADDRESS
ON MONDAY AFTERNOON, SEPTEMBER 28, 1885,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
DELIVERED AT THE MONTHLY MEETING OF THE LONDON BANKS' PRAYER UNION,
HELD AT THE EGYPTIAN HALL, MANSION HOUSE, LONDON,
THE RIGHT HON. THE LORD MAYOR, M.P., IN THE CHAIR.

[This address has been lengthened a little in order to fill the usual number of pages. It has also been revised sufficiently to make it read much the same as it was heard. There were passages which depended so much upon the voice and tone that they could not be reproduced by letterpress.]

MY LORD MAYOR AND GENTLEMEN—I was asked to give *an address* to the members of the Banks' Prayer Union and to others occupied in banking, but I beg to warn you all that an address from me is very much like a sermon. I am so in the habit of preaching, that almost of necessity my talk drops into sermon form. I have heard a story of a painter of signboards in Harp Alley in the olden times which illustrates the force of habit. An innkeeper selected an angel as the sign of his house, and asked this knight of the brush to produce one, but the painter replied, "You had better have a lion. I have been painting lions so long that they are more in my line than angels." My host answered that there were three or four lions of different colors in the street already, and that he must have an angel. "Well," said our artist, "if you must have an angel, you shall have an angel, but it will be dreadfully like a lion." Thus it comes to pass that when I am compelled to give an address it is extremely like a sermon. I pray you have patience with me now that I have confessed my weakness.

A philosopher has remarked that if a man knew that he had thirty years of life before him, it would not be an unwise thing to spend twenty of those years in mapping out a plan of living, and putting himself under rule, for he would do more with the ten well-arranged years than with the whole thirty if he spent them at random. There is much truth in that saying. A man will do little by firing off his gun if he has not learned to take aim.

Possibly I address myself to some who have up to now lived haphazardly, and if so, I invite them to a more hopeful method of living. To have a great many aims and objectives is much the same thing as having no aim at all, for if a man shoots at many things he will hit none, or none worth hitting. It is a grand thing to know what we are living for, and to live for a worthy objective with the undivided energy of our being. Shall we, when the end comes, have made a success of life? Has our objective been a right one, and has it been wisely pursued? Are the results of our conduct such as we shall wish them to have been when the conflict of this mortal life is over? These questions deserve consideration at once.

Another question arises out of them—*what position should religion occupy in reference to a man's life?* That is a question which naturally arises in the arranging of life, for whatever we chose to think of it, there is such a thing as religion in the world, and there is within us some yearning after spiritual things. We cannot help feeling that we need somewhat more than this visible world can offer us. Many of us find our greatest joy in the cultivation of that feeling, for it is to us the token of our spiritual nature, and the prophecy of immortality. To us this life is mainly worth living because it promises to be the introduction to a better life—

*"Alas for love, if you were all,
And nothing beyond, O earth!"*

Alas for life if this were all, and there were not a higher and better state of existence! No knell would be more doleful than that which signified the death of man's hope of immortality.

What position should religion occupy in your life and mine? The answer must depend very much upon another question—what is religion, and what does religion itself demand? What are the requirements of the great God, and of the soul, and of eternity? This question has suggested to me the text upon which I shall speak this afternoon—

***“Seek you first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”
Matthew 6:33.***

I shall not trespass beyond the appointed time. However prosy I may be during the time allotted to me, I shall stop when the hour is complete.

HERE IS AN ACCOUNT OF WHAT TRUE RELIGION IS. According to the words of Christ Jesus our Lord, it is “the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” Just now I read to you a portion of Scripture, Matthew 6:24-34, and I read it to you, that you might note that our text occurs in the midst of a warning against undue anxiety. Undue anxiety is very common among city men, and it is not rare anywhere. Certain of us are nervous, timid, doubtful, and prone to fear. There are plenty of pessimists about, although they will hardly recognize themselves by that title. To them evil is always impending, we are about to take a leap in the dark. All their birds are owls or ravens. All their swans are black. If it rains today, it will rain tomorrow, and the next day, and the next, and in all probability there will be a deluge, or if it is fine today, it will be dry tomorrow, and so on for months, and the earth and all the meadows that are therein will perish with drought. As to the sun, they observe with pleasing despondency that he has spots. His light they hardly notice, but they dote upon his spots with amiable horror. Minds of this sort—

***Find poisons in trees, deaths in the running brook,
Dirges in stones, and ill in everything.***

I suppose they cannot help it, yet Christian men *must* help it, for the Lord’s precept is plain and binding, “Be not therefore anxious.”

Fretful anxiety is forbidden to the Christian. In the first place, it is *needless*. Matthew 6:26, “Behold the fowls of the air,” said Christ, “they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better than they?” If you have a Father in heaven to care for you, are you not put to shame by every little bird that sits upon the bough and sings, though it has not two grains of barley in all the world? God takes charge of the fowls of the air, and thus they live exempt from care, why do not we?

Our Lord also taught that such anxiety is *useless* as well as needless, for, with all our care, we cannot add a cubit to our stature. Can we do anything else by fretful care? What if the farmer deploras that there is no rain? Do his fears unstop the bottles of heaven? Or if the merchant sighs because the wind detains his laden ship, will his complaining turn the gale to another quarter? We do not better ourselves a bit by all our fret and fume. It is infinitely wiser to do our best, and then cast our cares upon our God. Prudence is wisdom, for it adapts means to ends, but anxiety is folly, for it groans and worries, and accomplishes nothing.

Besides, according to our Savior, anxiety about carnal things is *heathenish*, “After all these things do the Gentiles seek.” They have no God and no providence, and therefore they try to be providence to themselves. As for the man of God who can say, “God’s providence is my inheritance,” why should he pine away with trouble? Let the heir of heaven act a nobler part than the mere man of the world, who has his portion in this life, and lives without God and without hope. Our distrust of our God is childish and dishonoring. I was going through these streets one day, driven by a friend in a four-wheeled chaise, and he, being a good driver, must necessarily drive into narrow places where it seemed to me that we should be crushed by the vans and omnibuses. I shrank back in my timidity, and expressed my unwise alarms so freely, that with a smile he laid the reins in my hand, and said, “If you cannot trust me, would you like to drive yourself?” From that ambition I was wholly free, and I assured him that he might drive as he liked, rather than make me the charioteer. Surely, the great God might well put the same proposal to those who are complaining of His providence. If we cannot trust *Him*, could we manage better ourselves? If we are men in Christ, let us believe in our God, and leave the governance of the great world outdoors, and of the little world within our own gates, to the Lord God, our heavenly Father, who will surely cause all things to work together for good to them that love Him.

It is plain that within us there is a propensity to be anxious. Can we not utilize it? Can we not turn it to account? I think so. Some are naturally thoughtful and careful; can they not transform this tendency into a benefit? We have a tendency to be anxious. Very well, let us be anxious, but let our anxiety run in the right direction. Here is a mental heat, let us apply it to some useful purpose. Our text sets before us *the true sphere of Christian carefulness*. “Seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” Seek *that* with all your care; seek *that* with all your energy. Be anxious about *that*. Let your whole mind

run in that direction with eagerness and thought. You cannot be too careful or too energetic when God and righteousness are concerned.

In our text there is a description of true religion, what is it? *“The kingdom of God.”* Without using a single superfluous theological term, I may say that the great God has always had a kingdom in this world. In the olden times He set up a kingdom among His people Israel, to whom He gave laws and statutes, but now the Lord is King over all the world, *“The God of the whole earth shall He be called.”* *“The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.”* God has a kingdom in this world, but it is too much neglected and forgotten of men. The first thing to be done by us is to enter that kingdom. Blessed is that man who has the Lord God to be his King, and has learned to order his life according to divine law. The highest liberty comes from wearing the yoke of God. The servant of men who dares not call his soul his own is a serf to be pitied, but the servant of God, who fears nothing but sin, is a man of princely mold. We must stoop before God that we may conquer among men. If we determine to yield ourselves wholly unto the Lord, we shall become influential among our fellow men.

We can only enter into this kingdom of God by being born again of His Spirit, for *“except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* In that new birth we learn to submit ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to find in Him eternal life. God has appointed the Lord Jesus heir of all things; by Him also He made the worlds. He says of Him, *“Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little.”* Faith in Christ casts our sins at the foot of His cross, and brings us an inward life unto holiness. We must believe in Jesus, and trust in His great atonement for sin, for apart from His full atonement there is no salvation, and no true service to God. This faith puts us into the kingdom of God, for to *“as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.”* The first anxiety of every man should be to be a loyal subject of the kingdom of God.

And when we feel that we are reconciled to God, and are under His supreme sway, our next objective should be to continue there, and to become more and more completely obedient to divine rule, so that we may more fully enjoy every privilege of the kingdom. In the kingdom of God every man is a king and a priest. He that serves God reigns. He that serves God is the possessor of all things. All things are ours when we are Christ’s—

*“This world is ours, and worlds to come:
Earth is our lodge, and heaven our home.”*

Let the Christian seek to know to the full what the heritage is of the saints in Christ Jesus.

Our next business should be to spread that kingdom—to try to bring others under the dominion of Christ. It should be the lifework of each man to bring others to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus. What opportunities most of you possess! Your station, your education, and your wealth, all give you advantages for serving the Lord. Are you using them? It is a great joy to the Christian minister to have about him a people who are missionaries in their daily lives. With great joy have I listened to some poor girl who has confessed her faith in Christ, and then has added very timidly, *“There is another girl waiting outside who would like to speak to you. She works with me in a warehouse in the City, and I spoke to her, and she sought Jesus, and I believe she is converted.”* I fear that many men of position are less diligent in winning souls than the poor workers they employ. Should it be so? He lives most and lives best who is the means of imparting spiritual life to others. May not some of you at the last come to a lonely end from lack of usefulness? We heard, not long ago, of the shipwreck from which a mother was washed on shore, but found all her children drowned. She telegraphed to her husband two words. The first was very pleasant to his eyes, *“Saved.”* The next was full of misery, *“Saved alone.”* Ah me! Would you or I like to have it—*“Saved alone”*? God forbid. When we reach heaven’s gate may we be able to say, *“Here am I, and the children that You have given me.”*

This is the meaning of that first word—*“Seek the kingdom of God.”* The reign of our Lord is to be our main objective if we would lead a well-ordered, useful, happy, and honored life.

Our text has a second word, *“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,”* by which I understand the practical part of true religion. Seek to have the imputed righteousness of Christ by all means, but seek also to exhibit the infused righteousness which comes of sanctification. Brothers in Christ, let us aspire after a high degree of holiness. We are called to be saints, and saints are not miraculous beings to be set up in niches and admired, but they are men and women who live, and trade, and do

righteousness, and practice charity in the streets of a city, or the fields of a village. Those who are washed in the blood of the Lamb should not be satisfied with the common cleanliness of morality, but the garment of their life should be whiter than any fuller can make it. Purity becomes the disciples of Jesus. In spirit, soul, and body we ought to be holiness to the Lord. Our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisee, it should be a reproduction of the character of our Lord.

By the phrase "His righteousness," I understand that power in the world which is always working, in some form or other, for that which is good, and true, and pure. Everything in this world which is holy, and honest, and of good repute, may count upon the Christian as its friend, for it is a part of God's righteousness. Does drunkenness eat out the very life of our nation? Do you want men of temperance to battle with this evil? The Christian man cries, "Write down my name." When the slave had to be freed, the subjects of God's kingdom were to the front in that deed of righteousness, and today, if oppression is to be put down, we dare not refuse our aid. If the people are to be educated, and better housed, we hail the proposal with delight. If the horrible sin of the period is to be denounced and punished, we may not shrink from the loathsome conflict. Let each man in his own position labor after purity, and as God shall help us, we may yet sweep these streets of their infamies, and deliver our youth from pollution. Every Christian man should say of every struggle for better things, "I am in it, cost what it may." Hosts of your professors of religion forget to seek God's righteousness, and seem to suppose that their principal business is to save their own souls—poor little souls that they are! Their religion is barely sufficient to fill up the vacuum within their own ribs, where their hearts should be. This selfishness is not the religion of Jesus. The religion of Jesus is unselfish; it enlists a man as a crusader against everything that is unrighteous. We are knights of the red cross, and our bloodless battles are against all things that degrade our fellow men, whether they are causes social, political, or religious. We fight for everything that is good, true, and just.

True religion is diffusive and extensive in its operations. I see people drawing lines continually, and saying, "So far is religious, and so far is secular." What do you mean? The notion is one which suits with the exploded notions of sacred places, priests, shrines, and relics. I do not believe in it. Everything is holy to a holy man. To the pure all things are pure. To a man who seeks first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, his house is a temple, his meals are sacraments, his garments are vestments, every day is a holy day, and he himself is a priest and a king unto God. The sphere of Christianity is co-extensive with daily life. I am not to say, "I serve God when I stand in the pulpit," for that might imply that I wished to serve the devil when my sermon was over. We are not only to be devout at church, and pious at prayer meetings, but to be devout and godly everywhere. Religion must not be like a fine piece of medieval armor, to be hung upon the wall, or only worn on state occasions. No, it is a garment for the house, the shop, the bank. Your ledgers and iron safes are to be made by grace "holiness unto the Lord." Godliness is for the parlor and the drawing room, the counting house and the exchange. It can neither be put off nor on. It is of the man and in the man if it is real. Righteousness is a quality of the heart, and abides in the nature of the saved man as a component part of his new self. He is not righteous who is not always righteous.

Undefined religion is a vital matter; it is in the life of the man. I am afraid that the religion of some people is like the shell of the hermit crab. At sea the dredge brings up innumerable creeping things, and among them creatures which have their own natural shells to live in, but here comes a fellow who has annexed the shell of a whelk, and bears it about as if it were his own. He lives in it while it suits him, and he gives up the tenancy when it becomes inconvenient, the shell is not part of him. Avoid such a religion. Beware of a Sunday shell, and a weekday without the shell. That religion which you *can* part with, you had better part with. If you can get rid of it, get rid of it. If it is not part and parcel of yourself, it is good for nothing. If it does not run right through you like a silver thread through a piece of embroidery, it will not avail for your eternal salvation.

I said just now that true godliness must be diffusive, and I return to the statement. I remember a remark of John Newton, once rector of St. Mary Woolnoth, across the road. He was a thoroughly Calvinistic preacher, but when one asked him whether he believed in Calvinism, he replied, "I am a Calvinist, but I do not take it as children eat lumps of sugar, I use it to flavor all my preaching, as men use sugar in tea or food." Hypocrites swallow religion in lumps, inviting all to admire the quantity, but sincere seekers after righteousness quietly dissolve their godliness in their lives and sweeten all their common relationships with it. The real saint flavors his ordinary life with grace, so that his wife, and his children, his

servants and his neighbors, are the better for it. Mr. Rowland Hill used to say that a man was not a true Christian if his dog and his cat were not the better off for it. That witness is true. A man's religion ought to be to him what perfume is to a rose, or light to the sun, it should be the necessary outcome of his existence. If his life is not fragrant with truth, and bright with love, the question arises whether he knows the religion of our Lord Jesus. The division between sacred and secular is most unhappy to both divisions of life, we want them united again. In the days of Queen Mary, a foolish spite dug up the bones of the wife of Bucer. Poor woman! She had done no ill, except that she had married a teacher of the gospel, but she must necessarily be dragged from her grave to be buried in a dunghill for that grave offense. When Elizabeth came to the throne, her bones were buried again, but to make the body secure from any future malice of bigots our prudent forefathers took the relics of a certain Popish saint, who was enshrined at Oxford, and mixed the remains of the two deceased persons past all chance of separation. Thus Mistress Bucer was secured from further disrespect by her unity with the body of one of the canonized. I want the secular to be thus secured by union with the sacred. If we could only feel that our common acts are parts of a saintly life, they would not so often be done carelessly. If we lay our poor daily life by itself, it will be disregarded, but if we combine it with our holiest aspirations and exercises, it will be preserved. Our religion must be part and parcel of our daily life, and then the whole of our life will be preserved from the destroyer. Does not the Scripture say, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus"?

"But," says one, "are we not to have amusements?" Yes, such amusements as you can take in the fear of God. Do whatever Jesus would have done. This is liberty enough for one who aspires to be like Jesus. There is happiness enough in things which are pure and right, and if not, we will not do evil to find more. We find pleasure enough without hunting for it in the outskirts of sin. There are joys which are as far above the pleasures of folly as the feasts of kings are above the husks of swine. At times our inner life flames up into a blaze of joy, and if usually it burns lower, there is at least a steady fire of peace upon our hearth which makes our life such that we envy none. It is not slavery that I set before you when I say that we are first of all to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, there is a present recompense which justifies the choice, and as for the eternal future, it pleads for it with a voice of thunder.

It is time that I changed the subject, and dwelt upon a further theme. **HERE IS AN ACCOUNT OF THE PROPER POSITION OF TRUE RELIGION.** "Seek you *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

Let the word "first" indicate to you the order of *time*. You know those venerable city gentlemen. I hope you reverence them as I do, since they are the embodiment of wisdom. One of these said to his son, "William, I am pleased to see you incline towards religion. But take my advice, and be reasonable. I have been in business now for forty years, and my advice is—stick to trade and make money, and then attend to religion." Now, the young man, as young men are apt to do, had begun to think for himself, and for a wonder, his thoughts ran in the right groove, and therefore he replied, "Father, I am always grateful to you for your good advice, but this time you must excuse me if I differ from you, for the Scripture says, 'Seek you first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness,' and therefore I cannot go in for making money first, but I must at once serve God, and yet I hope I may be none the less attentive to business." It is a good rule to begin as you mean to go on. That son was wiser than his counselor. My Lord Mayor will not say that he was wrong, I am quite sure, nor will anybody here, who has tried what it is to seek first the kingdom of God while engaged in business. True godliness is as good for this life as for the next. If I had to die like a dog, I would still wish to be a Christian. Place religion first *in the order of time*. Begin each week by carefully consecrating the first day to rest and holy worship. Begin each day by giving the dew of the morning to communion with heaven. Begin your married life by seeking the blessing of the great Father, and choosing for a partner one that will agree with you in the fear of God. In opening a new business, sanctify the venture with the supplications of godly friends, and in all fresh enterprises be guided of the Lord. If we begin, continue, and end with God, our way will be strewn with blessings.

Seek also the kingdom of God first *in order of preference*. If it should ever become a choice between God and Mammon, never hesitate. If wealth and righteousness, run counter to each other, let the gold perish, but hold fast to righteousness. Follow Christ, however dear it costs you. Blessed is that man who never deliberates, because his mind is made up rather to "suffer affliction with the people of God than to

enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” Blessed is the man who knows no policy but that of thorough consecration to God and righteousness—that is not careful to answer in this matter, but has his mind decided once and for all. This is his motto—

***“Tis done! The great transaction’s done:
I am my Lord’s, and He is mine.”***

We have lifted our hands unto the Lord, and we cannot go back.

“Well,” cries one, “But, you know, we must live.” I am not sure about that. There are occasions when it would be better not to live. An old heraldic motto says, “Better death than false of faith.” I am, however, quite clear about another necessity—*we must die*, and we had better take that “must” into consideration, and not quite so often repeat the sanctimonious phrase, “We must live.”

But we *shall* live, brothers, we shall live without grinding the poor, or stooping to questionable finance, or lying to the public by a false prospectus. We shall live without dishonor. We young men—we shall live without lowering our colors to please those who jest at godliness. Here stands one, who has run the gauntlet of public criticism for more than thirty years, and he has not suffered thereby, certainly he has not been forced to hide his faith, or recant his teachings. Silly stories, and jests, and sarcasms, have not killed us, nor even robbed us of our sleep. Younger brethren, never fear, if you are right, nothing can harm you. Stand your ground and keep it. Say, “I shall do what I feel it right to do, God helping me.” Any little difficulties which now arise will soon come to an end if you are firmly conscientious. Never be a coward—

***“I had as lief not be, as live to be
In awe of such a thing as I myself.”***

Let none of us ever raise a question about whether we shall please or displease by doing right, but let us “seek first the kingdom of God.”

Let godliness be first *in intensity*. It is to be feared that many give their force to their worldly pursuits, and their feebleness to their religion. They are “all there” during banking hours, but they are not “all there” at the hour of prayer. They remind me of one whose voice in our assemblies for prayer was exceedingly low, and well near inaudible, but in the shop he could be heard almost too well. Should it be so, that self should have our energies and Christ should have our lukewarmness? If ever we grow ardent and enthusiastic, it should be in the noblest of all causes, in the service of the best of Masters. In that work we cannot be too earnest; seldom enough do we meet with a person who verges upon excess of zeal in this matter. For Him who has redeemed us with His precious blood we cannot do too much, our heart complains that we cannot do enough. Alas! The comparative sizes of the Bible and the ledger are frequently symbolical; a neat little Bible is buried under a huge ledger. I claim for things divine a different place, let that be first which is first, throw your whole soul into the love and service of the Lord.

“Is your father a Christian?” said a Sunday school teacher to a child. The girl answered, “Yes, I believe that Father is a Christian, but he has not worked much at it lately.” No doubt there are, many of that sort. Their religion has taken a holiday, and they themselves have gone up to a sluggard’s bed. Let them be awakened, for it is high time to awaken out of sleep.

Seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first, by giving to true religion *sovereignty over your lives*. The helm by which life is steered should be in the hands of God. To glorify God and promote righteousness should be our master passion. This Aaron’s rod should swallow up all other rods. Be first a man of God, after that a banker, or a merchant, or a working man. I like to see our public men first Christians, then Englishmen, then Conservatives, or Liberals, or Radicals, as their convictions sway them, but in any case let a man be first a man of God. I would to God that our politics, our merchandise, our literature, our art, were all saturated with this idea—“First a Christian.” Then the secondary character would rise in excellence and nobility. Science, social laws, trade usages, domestic life, would all be the better for coming under the supremacy of living religion. The fear of God should be the foundation and the top stone of the social edifice, “Christ first,” and other things in their due order. Over and above all, let consecration to God shine forth even as the pillar of fire in the wilderness covered and illuminated the entire camp of Israel.

I may honestly claim five minutes more to complete the hour allotted to this service, and I will spend it by TAKING ACCOUNT OF THE PROMISE HERE MADE TO THOSE WHO “SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” Does anyone demand, “What will become of our business if we place godliness first?” The answer is in the text, “All these things shall be added unto

you.” A young man beginning life, resolving that he will do everything in the fear of God, and that as God helps him he will do nothing that is contrary to the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ—shall he prosper? He shall get on as far as this; he shall have bread to eat, and raiment to put on—all that is needful for this life “shall be added to him.”

“Alas!” sighs one, “I am out of place, and I know not how to provide for myself and my household.” Are you sure that this trial has come without your own fault? Then be not of doubtful mind, for the Lord will provide for you. He has said, “Trust in the Lord and do good; so shall you dwell in the land, and verily you shall be fed.” David’s experience was, “I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken.” The drunk, the vicious, the idle, the dishonest may suffer hunger, and it will be well for them if such discipline amends them, but to the upright there arises light in the darkness. They that serve God shall not have to complain of His deserting them. In the reign of Queen Elizabeth, a certain merchant of this great city was desired by her Majesty to go abroad for her upon affairs of state. He pleaded that his own business would suffer, whereupon her Majesty replied, “Sir, if you will mind my business, I will mind your business.” Rest assured that God will care for you if you make His service your delight. “All these things shall be added unto you.”

The blessings of this life come to gracious men in the best shape and form, for they come by divine promise. Suppose that it were now put into the power of each one of us to be rich, I suspect that the most of us would be eager to avail ourselves of the opportunity, and yet it is a moot point whether it would be best for certain of us to have the burden of wealth. It is a question whether some people, who behave splendidly where they now are, would be half as good, or a tenth as happy, if they were lifted to higher positions. I have seen heroes drivell under the influence of luxury. Many are the creatures of circumstances, and make but poor creatures when their circumstances allow of self-indulgence. We do not know what is best for us. It is sometimes very much better for us to suffer loss and disappointment than to obtain gain and prosperity. When that eminent servant of God, Mr. Gilpin, was arrested to be brought up to London to be tried for preaching the gospel, his captors made mirth of his frequent remark, “everything is for the best.” When he fell from his horse and broke his leg, they were especially merry about it, but the good man quietly remarked, “I have no doubt but that even this painful accident will prove to be a blessing.” And so it was, for, as he could not travel quickly, the journey was prolonged, and he arrived at London some days later than had been expected. When they reached as far as Highgate, they heard the bells ringing merrily in the city down below. They asked the meaning, and were told, “Queen Mary is dead, and there will be no more burnings of Protestants.” “Ah!” said Gilpin, “you see it is all for the best.” It is a blessing to break a leg if thereby life is saved. How often our calamities are our preservatives! A less evil may ward off a greater. Many a man might have soared into the clouds of folly if his wings had not been clipped by adversity. Better struggle and be honorable than become wealthy by disgraceful deeds. Agur’s prayer, “Give me neither poverty nor riches,” was a wise one, but our Lord’s is still better, “Not as I will, but as You will.”

“All these things shall be added unto you,” and the measure of the addition shall be arranged by infallible wisdom. Temporal things shall come to you in such proportion as you would yourself desire them, if you were able to know all things, and to form a judgement according to infinite wisdom. Would you not prefer a lot selected by the Lord to one chosen by yourself? Do you not joyfully sing with the Psalmist, “You shall choose my inheritance for me”?

Does not the promise also imply that needful things shall come to the believer without vexatious worry and consuming labor? While others are worrying, you shall be singing. While others rise in the morning and cry, “How shall we live through the day?” you shall wake to a secure provision, and you shall have a happy enjoyment of it. Your place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks, your bread shall be given you, and your waters shall be sure. Contentment with your lot, and confidence in God, will make life peaceful and happy, a dinner of herbs with content will yield a flavor of satisfaction unknown to those who eat the stalled ox. It is better to be happy than to be rich, and happiness lies in the heart rather than in the purse. Not what a man has, but what a man is, will decide his bliss or woe in this life and the next. Oh yes, if God Himself adds to you the things of this life, while you are serving Him, the lines will fall to you in pleasant places, and you will have a goodly heritage.

The wording, of the text, “All these things shall be added unto you,” reminds me that the acquisition of property often decreases a man rather than adds to him. Have you not seen a man become visibly smaller as his riches grew greater? It is a wretched sight, which has often pained me. I have distinctly

seen a man become “the architect of his own fortune” and the destroyer of himself. He has built up a palatial estate upon the ruins of his own manhood. It is a pity when a man bricks himself up with his growing gains. See that hole in the wall. The man stands in it and greedily cries for bricks and mortar. Golden bricks and silver mortar he must have. They bring him the materials. He cries eagerly for more. He cannot be content unless he builds himself in. The wall which shuts him out from his fellow men, and from the light of peace and true joy, rises higher and higher month by month, and year by year. His sympathies and charities are bricked up, for the wall is more than breast high. Still he pines for more metallic material. At last he is built in, buried beneath his own gatherings, lost to all manhood through his accumulations. You see his house, you see his carriage and his horses, you see his broadcloth and his broad acres, but you cannot see the man. Heart, soul, aspiration, spirituality, it is all gone, and nothing remains but a vault of greed and care, to be itself buried under a monument bearing these words, “He died worth half a million.”

A far more desirable idea is for a man to rise above his possessions, elevating life upon stepping-stones of these dead gains; building with them a pedestal, above which the inner manhood rises.

This is what God intends to do in providence to the man who serves Him heartily; He will add to him the things of this life. These shall be thrown in as supplements to the divine heritage. I incur certain little outlays in connection with my study, we need a few matters which may be paid for out of petty cash, but I have never seen, as far as I recollect, a single penny for string and brown paper, because as a reader and writer, I buy books, and then the string and brown paper are added to me. My purchase is the books, but the string and brown paper come to me, added as a matter of course. This is the idea of our text, you are to spend your strength on the high and noble purpose of glorifying God, and then the minor matters of what shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and how shall we be clothed, are thrown in as supplements. Earthly things are but the brown paper and string, and I pray you never think too much of them. Some people get so much of this brown paper and string that they glory in them, and expect us to fall down and worship them. If we refuse this homage, they are foolish enough to adore themselves. It must not be so among the servants of God. To us the man is the man, and not the guinea’s stamp. “All these things” are to us small matters; the real life of the soul is all in all. Do not slice pieces out of your manhood, and then hope to fill up the vacancies with bank notes. He who loses manliness or godliness to gain gold is a great cheater of himself. Keep yourselves entirely for God and for His Christ, and let all other matters be additions, not subtractions. Live above the world. Its goods will come to you when you do not bid high for them. If you hunt the butterfly of wealth too eagerly you may spoil it by the stroke with which you secure it. When earthly things are sought for as the main objective, they are degraded into rubbish, and the seeker of them has fallen to be a mere man with a muckrake, turning over a dung-hill to find nothing. Set your heart on nobler things than pelf! Cry with David, “I will lift up my eyes to the hills where from comes my help.” Men and brethren, let us so live that it will be safe for God to add to us the blessings of the life that now is, but that can only be done with safety when we have learned to keep the world under our feet.

May the Lord enable us to live to high and noble purposes, so that we may meet in the glory land, and hear the approving voice of Jesus, our Savior and Captain, saying to us, “Well done, good and faithful servants.”

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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