

SERMON BY ELDER A. H. SMITH,

At Lamoni, Iowa, April 6, 1894.

Subject, **SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**

In the record of the gospel as made by St. Matthew, sixth chapter, beginning at the twenty-fourth verse, we read:—

“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of it-

self. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

This, you will perceive, is a portion of the record of what is called the sermon on the mount. Upon examination carefully we discover that the great Teacher was addressing more especially this language to his disciples. And with this thought, that he was giving them instruction for the beginning of the great mission work which should so soon be given them, that was calculated to have its effect upon all the families of men. That portion of this reading that I wish to call your attention particularly to is found in the thirty-third verse, near the close of the chapter. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” In the Inspired Translation this is rendered, I believe, “Seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness.” Either reading or rendering will suit me to-night for the time that I may be able to converse with you, and the thought is the seeking the kingdom of God, and its righteousness.

You will notice in this lesson it is something of a treatise upon those things that are necessary to life, to this life. When I speak of this life I speak of the life of the creature, the natural man. And in connection with this I discover in the fourth chapter, fourth verse, if my memory serves me right, in St. Matthew, the instruction, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” In this commandment we see also that the natural life is taken into consideration.

And the bread that is spoken of, undoubtedly is that bread that goes to sustain the natural life. But this, in this declaration, is not of that character; and if we shall take thought we shall discover that there seems to be something essential that is not found in bread alone, nor in the meat that perisheth; but that which is essential, to supply the life which is requisite, and to make this present life of ours complete by the way of nourishment, is found in the word of God. And it has been made plain that it is not simply that which may have been spoken at one time, which may be recognized as the word of God; that it is not a part of that which is recognized as being of God; that it is not one commandment which we may recognize as the word of God; but that by "every word" which proceedeth from the mouth of God we are to receive life.

In reading the history of God's dealings with his people as found recorded in the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy the same statement is made. And God commanded his people then that they were not to live by bread alone, but by every word that should be spoken of God. Today we find ourselves surrounded by a great multitude of teachers who are claiming that they are teaching the word of God and teaching it for the purpose of saving the human family, saving man, upon the presumption that man is in a lost condition, that he needs salvation. But from these teachers we discover that diversity of opinion, that varied definition of what is recognized as the word of God, that presents to us the world divided and subdivided into many subdivisions as pertaining to that part of the word of God which is essential to that salvation, as affecting that life which is promised in the extension of the gospel to redeem man. And it seems to me that there has not been a time in the history of the world when this exhortation that we shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God

might be taken into consideration with more profit. There never has been a time in the history of the world, so far as I am able to judge, when this thought should be more firmly impressed upon the minds of the people, that *all* that God has said for the benefit of men should be taken into consideration in order that they may receive that salvation promised through the word of God.

In my text the great Teacher seems to think that the one thing needful in the outset is to first seek the kingdom of God, in the sense that that is rendered in the King James' translation. Allowing that thought to find lodgment, then, if we recognize that the kingdom of God is to be established and found among men, our efforts should be in the direction to become acquainted with that kingdom and its laws. And nowhere can we find that which reflects the kingdom of God, that which gives us any instruction upon which we can base action, intelligent action, that our research or our seeking may result to our benefit, save it be found in the word of God; and as God had spoken to man to enlighten him on this subject. It is a difficult thing for man to find out God, let him examine never so faithfully all the witnesses that may be presented to him in nature. Indeed it has been said that man by the wisdom of man cannot find out God, and in our researches we may delve deep, we may seek for information as far as it is possible for the human to go down into the earth, and every step that we take in that direction but develops and speaks the one testimony, that there is a God, a Creator, one whose powers of conception and creation are so far superior in every sense to man's that the thoughtful mind is stricken with awe as he examines the witnesses, and finds testified all the way along the line of his search the fact of the Creator's power to bring into existence; to make laws, to continue in existence, to keep and hold fast that which he

has created. But in our research in this direction there is not that which enables us to discover what the organization might be which is called the kingdom of God. We may seek elsewhere, yea traverse the surface of the earth—to the north, to the south, to the east, to the west, and examine all the witnesses we come to, and ask them the questions intelligently as we may, so far as the outward, inanimate world is concerned, and they are bearing the same testimony, they are all speaking in tones that when heard convey to the mind of the seeker the conviction that there *is* this power, that it *does* exist, or that it has established the laws by which that which we see around us does exist; the law that created them and the law that continues them in existence are his.

But we are at a loss to learn from these witnesses that surround us, which are many on the face of the earth, that which shall help us in the search to find that which when found, if we establish or seek diligently to establish, gives us the promise of the great Teacher that all things else needful shall be added. Indeed we may leave the surface of the earth, we may leave the testimony of the rocks and the hills, the trees and the flowers, and we may climb into the heights of the heavens above, as represented by the sun, the moon, and stars, and make our examinations in that direction, and we are just as far from coming to the conclusion that will be satisfactory in this search of finding the Author, that we may learn of his laws and become acquainted with his kingdom, as we were in seeking in the opposite direction. We see that the law which governs the sun is testimony of the wisdom of the Creator in planting the orb to give us light by day, to quicken and revivify the earth as the seasons come and go. And as we look upon the moon as she courses her way through the heavens we are stricken with wonder to see how grand has been

the thought that has called her into existence and caused her seasons, that the earth might be affected thereby and bring forth its plenitude for the maintenance of those that dwell upon it. But we are no wiser, further than that we are stricken with appall still greater, because these things reflect the grandeur of him whom we have been taught to call God.

We look among the stars; the great multitude of them stares us in the face. We cannot count nor enumerate them, and yet every one of them may be recognized as a witness testifying of the Creator. We may ask of those stars, individually or separately, ask of them in their constellations, or ask of them in the myriad multitude as they appear to us, as we make the examination, Who made them and planted them there? No voice comes back from them telling us of the nature of their Author, who he is, where he is, nor what we are to do that we may find favor in his sight and become acquainted with his kingdom, and enter upon a line of duty in that kingdom, and enter upon a line of duty in that kingdom that shall entitle us unto his protection and to receive of that life that is spoken of that shall endure forever. Examining these witnesses, allowing our thoughts to follow in these lines and channels for the purpose of information and instruction that we may be enabled to move forward in the line of our duty to obtain the better life, and finding that among them all though they may speak eloquently, they fail to tell us what we must do to be recognized a member of that kingdom, which the great Teacher says it is necessary we should seek to establish, we might call our thoughts from those glowing orbs that stand as beautiful witnesses testifying of their Creator, and let them run in the channel of information that might be supplied by our fellow comrades in life, known as the human family, and where can we learn from them the information that shall enable us to place

ourselves in security, assuming that we are in danger of being lost; nay, assuming that we are lost, admitting that the Scriptures conclude all men in sin, all men in a lost condition? Permitting this thought to come upon us we ask ourselves the question, Where can we find the information among our fellow men that will enable us to place ourselves in security and receive the promise that he has made? There is one thought that attaches right here, and that is this: If these witnesses that we sometimes call dumb witnesses, these material things that appear to us in the great world and its environments, if they cannot speak, and speak intelligently, and give us the information we seek, we must find it elsewhere; and we naturally turn to our fellow men and ask them concerning the information we are seeking. And what evidence have we that they can tell us, and tell us the truth? When I ask this question I ask it with the thought in my mind that the world as it has come to us, in its best supposed Christian state, stands as a witness declaring that man, with the best wisdom that he can use in the things pertaining to God and God's kingdom, with all the light that has been given to him, fails to comprehend the law that God has revealed, which is to be recognized as the law of the kingdom and to bring man into an understanding, so that he may reasonably conclude that he is living by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.

The work of the great Teacher began when he gave these instructions that we read to you to-night, from which we have formulated these sentences, that work has been going on. Though it may have been seemingly retarded by changes that have occurred, yet it has been going on; and from the time that God spoke to Israel through his servant Moses and told Israel that they must live by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of the Lord, to the present time, that command-

ment has never been changed by him who is the author of it. Its repetition in the day when Jesus sent his disciples out into the world stands in evidence that it was intended to remain as a universal, general principle that was to be applied to all the human family. Now of these witnesses to which we have called attention, I ask the question, from what source may we obtain the information? This leads us to the thought that there is none so able, there has never been presented in the economy that surrounds us anything that comes anywhere near the thought as reaching us in all our varied circumstances as we seek this kingdom and seek to establish it, like the thought that God himself is the best able to define himself, his laws, and what his kingdom is, and what it is to be recognized as, when his kingdom may be established, should it be established, among men. No witness is so truthful, no witness can be so good as the author himself. And as we look back over the history of man, in all the various stages as he has been represented to us as having been directed by this divine influence and by this great Creator, we discover that God himself has taken care that his words should be given to the human family along the line of man's history. He has taken care that those words should not only be given, but that they should be preserved. And having been given and having been preserved, they come down to us in history fraught with the important intelligence that if we seek and seek diligently we shall find in his word that which shall give unto us that life, that better life, that is promised in it by the nourishment that is to be received by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.

This promise of eternal life, which is found in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, is predicated, that is, the receipt of that life, is predicated upon obedience to the commandments of God, the words

of God. We look back in the history of God's people, and in looking back we do so for the purpose of information. If these promises were of value unto man anciently, they are of value to men now. If they are of value to men now, they are of value to men in the future. The thought that is inculcated in the word of God, all through it, remains the same; that he is unchangeable. It comes to us with full force, and when this thought finds lodgment in our hearts, we can examine carefully that which has been given and compare it with that which we have now; thus we can discover as to whether there has been a change; a change in God; a change in the author. If there has been a change in the author, this change will be made manifest somewhere along the line of the history. But if we discover in the examination of the history that there has been no change in him, and there is not found to-day that which is represented as the kingdom of God, though the manner of it may have been revealed eighteen hundred years ago, then there is a change somewhere else, and that change has not been made for the benefit of the human family. I make this statement because if there had been no change by man, men would to-day be standing united in their understanding and knowledge of the kingdom of God and that law of life which is found in the gospel of Christ and in the words of God essential to their redemption. But when we discover them so far from that unity that should be found by reason of being nourished, fed, strengthened, and built up, and quickened by the words of God; find them dying and dead so far as the spiritual life is concerned, and no unity of thought or action in regard to the words that shall bring life, it is evidence to us that there is a change; and that the change that has been made has *not* been made for the good of those that were seeking the kingdom or seeking to build it up.

We go into the great arena of spiritual

warfare as teachers (I speak now to those who have been commissioned in these latter days as teachers, as those engaged in the representation of the laws of the kingdom) and we have the world to meet; we have the changes that are found in the world, or that have been wrought by reason of a variety of teachers, and the differences in the constructions made upon the word of God, or in the construction as to what is essential to man in the word of God, as represented in the history, and what we have received of it, in the Bible, the Old and New Testaments. How often we meet these differences! We have to meet them, and in meeting them we seek to place ourselves upon the same platform upon which the great Teacher placed himself; and when there arises controversy upon those things that are plainly necessary for man's salvation, when there arises controversy upon these questions, our invariable refuge is, "It is written;" and we quote that which is written, which has been accepted and recognized as the word of God. And in this we have found, in the past, our safety; and in this we will find our safety in the future; and so long as we stand upon the platform where stood the great Teacher, and call the attention of the world to "It is written," and demonstrate that that which is written is the word of God, and that it remains unchanged, we stand behind a bulwark that can never be moved, because we stand behind that which God has said; and are living by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God. It has been said that our safety is in the law, our safety is in finding the law, our safety is in living the law, our safety is in seeing that the law of God is kept.

Individually our safety rests in keeping the law of God, whether we be of the church or of the world. If we be of the world and seek to obtain the kingdom of God, the first duty is for us to obtain a knowledge of the laws by which we may

become members of the kingdom. The great Teacher comprehended this when he commanded his disciples, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." He understood that a knowledge of these principles was necessary to save men, and those same principles are as essential to-day to save men as they were then. And when we advocate them, we advocate them simply as the fundamental principles of the organization of that kingdom of God which we are constantly seeking to establish, through and by the power of Christ Jesus the Son of God. There is no greater service that man can render to God than to seek this kingdom, and having found the kingdom, seek to establish it and establish its righteousness. We are sometimes called a peculiar people. We are peculiar as compared with those who claim to believe in God and Christ and yet do present these principles as they try to represent God and Christ in all the world. We represent God and Christ in all the world by the use of every word which proceedeth from the mouth of God. We are a peculiar people, a peculiar band of brethren, a peculiar association of teachers, as compared, I say, with those that have represented or may claim to represent what they understand to be the kingdom of God and the means of salvation to the human family but who fail to declare the whole counsel of God.

Now I will touch upon some of our peculiarities. And these peculiarities are of such a character that they should be recognized in the search that we are making, in the search that we should make. In the first instance we have been led to believe that this great Teacher who made use of the language upon which we have predicated our thoughts to-night, this Jesus Christ the Son of God; we have been taught to believe that he lived, that he died, that he was resurrected and now lives. We have been taught to believe that if our faith is found in him—our safety, our salvation is found in him—that salvation will happen and come to us here in this life, and will come to us in the life to come. In this we are peculiar, in this we are different, because it has largely been taught that that which

is to be received as eternal life that cometh through Christ Jesus the Son of God is to be received in its ultimate and its grand success, away yonder beyond those shining orbs we see in the skies above; that the full fruition of our hopes in Christ Jesus will never be reached until we have passed from this life unto that which is beyond, and that will be reached in the heavens above; while *we* have been taught, and let me tell you the understanding of this that we advance to you is received by reason of a compliance with and acceptance of every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God, not by a few isolated passages, but by taking all that is taught in the word of God; comparing them, linking them together, and examining them carefully that we may be thoroughly conversant with those laws of our being which shall give us life here, life more abundantly when we shall have ceased this mortal life, and this sphere of action, by making application of every word. By using every word, by feeding upon every word, by being strengthened by every word, we have been led to this conclusion; hence we teach that when the kingdom of God shall have its free existence, its full existence, when the great King shall come to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords, and shall become our King in very deed, his kingdom will be spiritual, and it will be here, on this earth; and we have predicated this hope upon the testimony of the great Teacher himself. There is no evidence found in the law that he was going and going to stay. As I make this statement that we predicate this hope, this faith upon the teaching of the great Teacher himself and his testimony, my mind is carried out and I seem to see those chosen disciples that were so near and so dear to him as they surrounded him upon the mountain side, when he was giving them the law, the last lessons that he taught them as he stood in their midst, face to face; I seem to see them there as conversing with him. In the very act of blessing them, he is caught up from them, and ascends into the heavens above. Why, it seems to me that I can see from the countenances of those men as they stand gazing upon the Master as he ascends into the heavens above the disappointment that is written there by

reason of the thought that he whom they had loved so well, he whom they had anticipated had come to remain and that they had built their hopes upon,—that he had taken the reins of government in Israel, and would sit upon the throne of David,—as he was lost to the sight, how sad they must have felt, and how the briny tear must have come to their eyes, and how they must have wept at the thought that he was going, he whom they thought would lead them on and on to life and glory and bring them to a full fruition of their hopes in the establishment of God's kingdom among men nevermore to be removed or to be thrown down! If there was ever a time in the history of Christ and his people when there was need for a consoling word, it was then. And then he gave the consoling word; it was sent by the angels to console those men, to comfort those that had grieved because they seemed to see all their hopes vanishing as the Master left them; the angels came to them and said to them, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" Time was precious; "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" The thought is, the time is precious. This one who is now taken from you comes again, is the thought. Not another, not another Lord, but this same Jesus, this one that you have lost; this one that you stood by and listened to, that your hearts have been moved in sympathies with love toward him, and going out from him towards all mankind, this loving Master, him whom ye loved so well, "shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." I say, we have been taught to believe that the fruition of our hopes will be had here, while others have been taught that they will receive theirs *hereafter* and *there*. In this we are peculiar, and yet our peculiarities in this sense rest in that we have accepted every word of God that brings this conviction to our souls.

I see this same Teacher in another scene, while he is talking with those that he loves, and telling them concerning him that this same kingdom shall be preached. I seem to see him in conversation with them upon things that were necessary, and telling them of the future; telling them that he is going away from them; telling them that he is going and going for a purpose, and that purpose is

that he is going to prepare a place for them; and telling them if he went and prepared a place for them, he would come again. But the direct promise of the Son of God to his disciples is that if he left them he would come again; and his teachings, and his instructions, and all that he has uttered for the salvation of the sons of men has been of that character, that all these years from then till now it has been continually written in the history that has been made, this witness, that his testimony was true. And if the evidence from the time that he gave this instruction to his disciples was of that character that we can read it and comprehend it, and that his testimony is true, and the history as revealed to us proves it to be true, we continually look for his coming back. And when he comes back we expect that he will come to those that are prepared to receive him. Hence we are teaching and warning those that are living in that manner that when he does come, as the righteous King, there will be those who will be prepared when he comes, having the authority of continual rule, they may be prepared to lead with him, strike hands with him, and stand shoulder to shoulder with him on the great platform of life, that shall be given to the human family then; and we will feed on the word of God, not on bread alone. We will feed on the word of God. Believing this, and believing that the object of his teaching that was given—believing that the object was had in view, away up yonder in the stream of time when God spake to Moses and told the children of Israel that they must live by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God, he comprehended the nature of the work that was to be accomplished. He comprehended the end; he signified to them in that that was to be given to the human family by which they were to be made ready for the accomplishment of the end, the establishment of God's kingdom in its righteousness; wherein should be found all who loved righteousness; wherein should be found those who had made themselves worthy to be citizens of the kingdom of God. "Seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness." Seek it first. As rendered in the Inspired Translation, "Seek to establish" the kingdom of God.

We hear much sometimes about the

kingdom of God being in a man's heart. We have little to say in regard to that, but if there is found in the man's heart the desire to seek the kingdom of God, and that man puts into operation the desire, and seeks in the right direction, that man will be filled with hope and enthusiasm, having found the kingdom of God, to establish it, and make it secure, that he shall be secure and eternally saved. The world is in a lost condition; lost from home, lost from God. God is feeling after them. He knows where they are, but they are lost in their own condition, in their own relationship to him. They are wanderers, they are in darkness, and they are in darkness because they will not be found. We sometimes think that this should be declared as reason why we should seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. You discover that it has its broad application. It has its application to the individual that is seeking to be saved. But chiefly, as we represent it to you now in the thought, it has its application as addressed by the Lord Jesus Christ to his disciples; it carries with it the thought that all else in life should be subjected to this work.

There is no man, there is no woman, but has an interest,—if they have an interest in their own salvation,—in establishing the kingdom of God; establishing its righteousness. The teachers and the ministers of the kingdom cannot establish its righteousness upon the people; the people must establish the righteousness of this kingdom. If they establish it in their hearts, in their minds, and reform their minds, and make them as the word of God teaches they should be, as individuals they are doing just so much in establishing the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Our duty, then, as individuals, is to seek the kingdom of God.

Our duties as teachers preëminently are to seek to build it up. Now in the lesson that we have read you the statement is, "No man can serve two masters." No man can serve two masters successfully. Reason teaches you this. Your experience in life, and mine, will teach you this; and if you wish to make success in the act of seeking to find, you must make it a specialty; not the second matter in life, but a specialty. If you wish to be free from evil, if the gospel has found you in the world tainted and contaminated by sin, and you desire those things that go to mar the character of a man as represented in the law of morality if it has found you in that condition, the work of reformation must be done by you, and you cannot do that in a minute. It must be done gradually, and in doing it gradually, as you build yourself up in that life of pure thought and action you are establishing the kingdom. Having sought it, having found it, it becomes your duty to prepare yourself for the ultimate that is promised of the Lord Jesus Christ, that when he shall come to make up his jewels you will be found worthy. Then the work of seeking is to obtain the object. The object is to be made pure, to be made righteous, to become members of that kingdom, to be recognized as members of that kingdom, worthy of any position in it, that God, who is author of it, might feel called upon to place you in. Let us not lose sight of this thought, that the real work that lies before us is the preparation in this life that when the change shall come, and should it come to us, we will be prepared to enter in, and possess, and occupy in the life to come, in the kingdom of God. May God help us, and lead us, and direct us, and feed us by every word that proceedeth from his mouth.

(Reported for the *Herald* with the Edison phonograph by F. E. Cochran.)