

THINGS ADDED TO A SEEKING SOUL.

Lord's Day Evening, January 1st, 1928.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."—MATT. vi. 33.

IF we had to take every day of this year into account and count up what we should need, even at the least reckoning, what a great number of things there would be. We cannot really reckon it up aright, how many things, even essential, necessary to our body, necessary to our life, which we shall require if we live to the end of the year; and sometimes we look at those things too anxiously, as though they had to be provided all on the first day, for our comfort and peace of mind, so that we could say, "We can go through the year." But that is not the language of this chapter; that spirit of over-anxious thought is reproved many times, that concern which is continually taken up with this: "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed" on the morrow? What shall we eat to-morrow, and what shall we drink to-morrow, and wherewithal shall we be clothed to-morrow, and the next day, and the day after that? And the Lord here, knowing how it moves in the heart and mind, says: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself; sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

Looking into one's own case, how many, many times have I thought I could never speak again. All Gospel freedom and unction has gone; all the spirit of it, the felt liberty of it, the felt enjoyment of it. Then it is

all heavy and hard-going; then there is this conclusion—"it cannot go on; there is no supply left." But it is like the manna in the desert, given every day afresh; it was not for them to keep over from one day to another. Here is our encouragement: "Wait on the Lord" for fresh things; not changed things, but the same things afresh. The Gospel is a wonderful thing. The Lord so often makes the Gospel fresh; it is the same as our fathers knew, as we have known, and will know. It does not change in its nature, nor does it change in its effect. The Lord in His mercy and favour makes it fresh, and sometimes it is just like a new thing, as though we had never seen it before; the same thing, but another side of it, another view of it, and this chapter seems at times to speak anew. "Do not be over-anxious about the future." Yet that is just what we are. We weary ourselves out with undue anxiety, and the Lord here tells His disciples that He knows all about to-morrow, and He will manage it when it comes. We cannot. We may say this to ourselves, chide ourselves for our folly, and yet do it again. We have no power, no ability, no wisdom of our own to exclude this over-anxious thought; and this word which I have read as a text is a word that will cover the whole of this year, and the whole of next year if spared; no matter how far off the need may be from us, it is covered by this text. Now, that is what I would try to look into and speak of—this *ye* in the text. Who is the person addressed? "Seek *ye* first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness."

It may be said there are two kinds of people addressed here; there are those who are not sure with any measure of comfort of mind that they belong to the family of God at all, and there are those who have had some clear manifestation of the love of God to their souls, and have often proved this word true, yet are tried again and again about it. It is a word to both, it will meet both cases if applied by the Spirit of God.

Take the first. Some of you seek after the things of God—you know that—but you have not found them

yet to the joy and the rejoicing of your heart; you are after things you have not reached. The Apostle speaks thus of himself: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I *follow after*, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii. 12). There is something he is after. Some of you may say, "I have not that joy I would have, but I am after it, I am seeking it. The Lord has withheld it, and yet He knows where I am, He knows what I would have." But other things keep intruding—the cares of this world, carnal policy in regard to providing things necessary to the body, inducements to leave the house of prayer to attend to business. This is part of the temptation of the devil to draw away those who are seeking after the Lord Jesus Christ, to make them loiter in their race, to entangle their feet, and then to say: "You will never arrive at that state of peace and joy, because you are so carnal; the Lord will not have carnally-minded people. You will never arrive at a good hope through grace, because you are carnally-minded. Carnal-mindedness is death, and you are dead, you have no spiritual mind; that is what you lack, that is what you will never have, you cannot have two opposite things running in the same way; therefore it proves clearly you have no spiritual mind." Now this Book, this Word of God, this inspired Word of truth, takes all that into account; and explains the whole thing to a seeking, fearing, inquiring mind. There are two minds in a child of God; there is that which minds the flesh, and that which minds the Spirit. One seeks after God and holiness, the other seeks the world and lives in unholiness because that is its element; but the new man of grace is not defeated, is not destroyed, by the old man of sin; that has been settled by God Himself—"Sin shall not have dominion over you." The Lord does not say it will not make ravages, it will not make havoc, but, "It shall not have *dominion*;" that is, it will never hold the field unchecked, never be able to say, "I have driven grace out of the field altogether." Prayer cannot

be altogether destroyed; it moves, it lives, it labours, it begs on, it comes out in groans and sighs. Many a heavy sigh is heaved out by a child of God who feels he cannot pray, mourns his prayerlessness, and says: "I shall never be able to address the Lord aright. I am black, I am defiled, I am defeated." It is because Satan is against you, he always will be against a seeking soul. Well, the child of God feels he can do nothing rightly, and he strives and struggles, feels he is defeated all along the line, but still presses after the things of God. This, then, is the word to him: "Seek ye *first*," let it never be second; let this be ever before your mind, that "they who seek *shall* find, to them that knock it *shall* be opened;" those who enquire shall have an answer; God will reply in His own good time, if we seek first His kingdom. Oh! that that might be ever before the heart and mind of those who are pressed down, often put to the worse before the enemy, and driven out of the land of promise into a land of uncertainty, barrenness and rebellion. That is a very dry land to live in, but still this seeking spirit cannot be destroyed even there, and must eventually prevail.

Now let us notice how it fares with the other character. There are times when they can say, "I know this text is true, for I have proved it." They can see how the Lord *has* done exactly what He says. Their heart has been warmed in Divine things, in keeping His precepts, ordinances and commandments, and they find this to be true—they change. The Lord does not change in Himself, though He changes His course; He removes those comforts which He at one time so clearly added. Fear now arises that the hand of God has gone out against him, and will not be turned toward him again. Now is the time for the adversary to rush in like a flood. Satan has a multitude of accusations; he can very clearly charge self-indulgence, covetousness and love of the world, and he says, "Now the Lord is full of indignation against you; now you are like the Galatians, you are bewitched, you have followed after this wretched world; the Lord has turned His hand

against you, and that is final." Oh, how he drives those thrusts into the heart; there is no response when you read the Scriptures, they seem to be quite different. You say, "Ah! I did once seek the Lord, and He did give me many answers to prayer—at least I hope He did—but now I fear it was all a cheat; I was ensnared into a hope for which I had no real ground, and now the Lord is against me. What will be my end? Besides this, I have a wicked heart that goes after all manner of wicked things. I have idols in my heart, and the Lord says of the kingdom of heaven that no idolater shall enter there. I fear I shall prove one at last." This gracious injunction is addressed to a seeker who fears his seeking will not have any success because of his many lapses. Now these things that have been so great an oppression to the mind, and have filled it up day after day with fears and anxieties which concern the body, those things God Himself will look after. See how He puts the case throughout the chapter. Remember who it is that puts it. He who knew all about ravens and their needs, knew all about the lilies; He clothed them. He made the earth: "The sea is His, He made it, and His hand formed the dry land." He made all creatures upon it, and not one did He make without making suitable provision for it. He placed the fish in the sea, and the birds in the air, and man upon the earth, all in their element. How has the world continued since He made it? How is it all the birds are not dead, all the fishes have not disappeared, and all the human race come to an end? How is it? Because He is the great Maintainer; He has maintained all that huge number of creatures to which He Himself gave being. His mighty voice speaks this word. He made the sea, and He can control it; when the waves lift up He stills them by a word. He it is who speaks *this* word, and gives power to believe it. "I know He *can* do it," you say; "but oh! I fear if His anger is toward me, that He *will* not. My crooked ways merit His anger, and therefore He *will* not." You do not question His power. There is enough food, we

are told, in the sea to feed the whole human race; there is enough on the land to feed them also. There are huge reserves in the hand of this Almighty God, and He gives them out according to His will, as His creatures have need. But this exhortation is addressed in a particular way to those who fear they will not receive their supplies, though they seek them at the hand of the Lord.

It is not a question with them as to *how* these matters are done, but they believe the Lord *can* do all that He has said; they do not question that. The world at large does not trouble about the power of God, but the fearing child of God knows He has the power. Will He supply out of His power? Out of His mighty hand will He supply my needs? Well, seeing He says this about the ravens, "They neither have storehouse nor barn, and God feedeth them," that is surely a word to His poor people. Ravens feed on prey. Does He give them prey? They live on that. And will He deny those who love good wholesome gospel food—clean things—will He deny them that which they need? No. If He gives food to ravens, He will surely give us ours; He will not deny His own promises. "My God shall supply all your need," says Paul, because God was his God, and thus he could say, "He feeds the ravens, He clothes the lilies, He will feed every one of His family;" and though some of you might say, "Well, these are good words, it is true; but I want the Lord to *do* this. I am in straits now, and no relief comes"—Have you not proved in days past that He does it? Oh! but you say, "Will He do it in the future? In the past I have had a multitude of instances, but I am so concerned about the future." Here is a word that speaks in that direction—it has all to do with that—the raven has a future as we have, and though it has no power to envisage that future, it does not go short on that account. Nor is it a question of being able to provide for itself; that very food is a provision from God, without any skill of its own. And have you not sometimes found this to be the case, that the Lord has reversed all the expectations you have

raised—you thought the provision *must* come some particular way, and it has come in exactly the opposite? Instead of it being from a friend, it is from a foe. A raven was no friend to Elijah, but the Lord chose the manner and means, and the amount of his provision. He did not send it all at once in the morning, but fresh in the evening again. How kindly does the Lord supply. It would have lasted out the day if He had sent it all in the morning, but He sent twice; and though the first part of it was not very much, it lasted him to the latter part of the day, and then there came some more. He had no need to be anxious during the night, for the ravens were there in the morning just the same as before. Whatsoever the Lord has done, He will do; and I believe He will keep His children looking and waiting, and hoping in Himself, and build them up by one means or another, take away all dependence on human props and human supports. He knows best. Oh! to have a single eye, to have the whole body full of light, to have this purpose of heart. The Lord will surely answer in His own good time and way.

But He does not only mean these temporal things; there is more in this text than that. "Seek ye first *the kingdom of God and His righteousness*, and all these things shall be added unto you." It has to do, I believe, with the gospel provision, the provision of the ministry, and the provision of the minister; all the things that His people require. My mind has been exercised something like this during the day. The Lord, I trust, will give me some spiritual favours, not merely for myself—though I would enjoy them—but may they be given to me for you; and I find the Apostle speaks much in that way, "Whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation . . . or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation." Whatever he received, it was for them, it was to be handed out ministerially for the good of others. He was willing to be a channel through which the words might reach their souls, and so it is the Lord provides. Seek ye first the interests of the kingdom of God, the welfare of His

Zion, and all these things shall be added unto you. "Prove Me now, herewith," saith the Lord, "if I will not open to you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house." All these things shall be added unto you that seek the Lord for them, that are seeking first the kingdom of God. It will also have this effect, a right seeking will be covered with a right walking; and those who seek aright, speak with their feet as well as with their lips, yea, more clearly with their feet than with their lips. Some are slow of speech, but they walk in straight ways, and these walkings prove their heart to be right toward the Lord. There is a keeping of His commandments without much word of the tongue, the word of the feet is more eloquent; that humble consistent behaviour of a child of God, speaks more than all the words that the tongue can use. To seek first the kingdom of God is to have regard to His commandments and His ordinances.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God" with regard to those things which He has enjoined. He has said to His people: "If ye love Me, keep My commandments;" "Do this in remembrance of Me." It is His will that His children who love Him and fear Him should attend to the ordinances of His house, and though you may say, "I am not able; I cannot speak, I cannot walk as I would;" yet put this first before everything else, and the Lord will put everything else straight. He will give you something to say, and when He sets the tongue at liberty, that tongue moves rightly; there is something to say to the honour of God, and nothing to say about self except as a poor wretched sinner who has found mercy. He says: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." He fills it with arguments and with praise, and gives with it a dependent, loving, child-like simplicity. There will be a walking in accordance with His will; a saying, "We will go with you, for we have heard the Lord is among you, and we know it by the feeling sense of it."

When the Lord gives a directing word, He makes it easy to follow, for the commandment is also the enabling. When the Lord speaks, He gives the power of His Spirit to His hearing people, and though you may say, "It will be detrimental to me in a secular way," never mind that. "Seek ye first" before you have to do with time things. Put this first. "Seek the kingdom of God," and not only His kingdom, but His righteousness with it. It seems to say, "Seek the righteousness which comes from Him; not merely that imputed righteousness, that glorious robe of Christ's righteousness, but grace to live godly and righteously in this present world before men." We are enjoined to walk the gospel out, to seek to live to the praise and honour and glory of God; and the Lord will do all those other things, those needful things, those required things. He will never be indebted to us, and when we come to the end of the journey, it will be as it was with Joshua; there had not one thing failed of His good promise, all came to pass. He took the children of Israel over Jordan, He quelled all those nations, He brought them down before Israel just as He had said; it all came to pass, they found the old corn of the land waiting for them. He gave them their inheritance just where He told them it would be; and just so it will be in regard to this word which I have read: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God"—the interests of that kingdom, of His servants, and the people in it—"and all these things shall be added;" those who put the things of God first will find the word true. "Added"! as though He would say, "These things are not part of the kingdom, but you need them in the way to the kingdom." The Lord will add them; He gives them, He supplies them. They are not our god, they are not our goal, they are not our element as such, but they are needed things.

This word is addressed to those who have such anxiety. May the Lord apply it, use it, and bless it for His own glory and our good. Amen.