
CALLED OUT UNTO CHRIST

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Richmond, Virginia
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Available from:

Christian Tape Ministry
4424 Huguenot Road
Richmond, Virginia 23235

www.christiantapeministry.com

PRINTED IN USA

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The two messages contained in this booklet were given as spoken ministry by Stephen Kaung in Richmond, Virginia in July and August, 2003. The spoken word has been transcribed and printed by permission with only minimal editing for clarity. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the *New Translation* by J. N. Darby.

BE SEPARATED

Galatians 1:4—Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, so that he should deliver us out of the present evil world, according to the will of our God and Father.

Galatians 6:14—But far be it from me to boast save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.

John 17:6,11,14,18-19—I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world. They were thine, and thou gavest them me, and they have kept thy word. . . And I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one as we. . . I have given them thy word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, as I am not of the world. . . As thou hast sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world; and I sanctify myself for them, that they also may be sanctified by truth.

II Corinthians 6:17-18—Wherefore come out from the midst of them, and be separated, saith the Lord, and touch not what is unclean, and I will receive you; and I will be to you for a Father, and ye shall be to me for sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

Shall we pray:

Dear Lord, we want to thank Thee for gathering us before Thy table this morning. Lord, our hearts are forever grateful for what Thou hast done for us. Thou didst give Thy all to us. What can we say? Lord, we want to hear Thy word. We want to follow Thee. We want to love Thee. We want to give ourselves wholly to Thee. May Thy name be glorified in each one of us. We commit this time into Thy hands. We trust Thy Holy Spirit to send Thy word into our hearts and bring us into Thy truth. We give Thee all the praise and glory in the precious name of our dear Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord seems to be impressing upon my heart these days on this matter of separation, that is, separation from the world. We know the word *church* in Greek is “ekklesia.” And *ekklesia* simply means “called-out ones, gathered together.” God has called us out of the world and gathered us together unto the name of our Lord Jesus, that is, unto the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. Out of every nation, every tribe, every tongue, God has gathered out a people for Himself. That is what the church is; that is what we are.

We are a chosen race, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession that we might set forth the excellencies of the One who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. That is what we are. We are the called-out ones. God has separated us out from the world that we may be wholly His.

We are different. We have a different life from that of the world. We have a different spirit, even the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit in us. We have a different manner of life, a way of life that is heavenly, not earthly. We are sojourners and strangers on this earth because we are like Abraham, the father of faith. We are looking forward to a city with foundations, of which God Himself is the builder. That is what we are. We are a separated people.

DELIVERED OUT OF EGYPT

When God delivered the children of Israel by the Pascal lamb, the angel of destruction passed over them. They were delivered out of death by the blood of the lamb, but God did much more than that. When God sent Moses to Pharaoh, God said, “Let My people go that they may serve Me.” In other words, God not only saved them from death by the blood of the lamb, but God delivered them out of the land of Egypt, out of the tyranny of Pharaoh. God knew that if they were saved from death and yet remained in Egypt they could not serve God. Pharaoh tried to keep them in Egypt. He said, “Why not worship God in Egypt? Why must you go away?” But Moses said, “We have to go three days journey in order to serve our God. Our men, our women, our children, our cattle, everything has to come out of

Egypt in order that God might be served.” Thank God, His work is so complete that He not only delivered them out of death in Egypt, He also took them out of Egypt by crossing the Red Sea and leaving Egypt behind.

When God’s mercy comes upon us, He does the same thing. In Galatians 1:4 it says, “Our Lord Jesus Christ, who saved us from our sins...” What a salvation that is! But that is not the end: “that He should deliver us out of this present evil world according to the will of our God and Father.” So it is the will of God not only to save us from our sins but also to deliver us from this evil world according to the will of our God and Father.

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

On the day of Pentecost when Peter delivered that message of salvation, he showed them that the One whom they crucified God had raised up, and He is now enthroned at the right hand of God. God has anointed Him King, and Lord, and Christ. When Peter spoke, many hearts were pricked because they were the ones who crucified our Lord. Then Peter said, “Repent, and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus that your sins may be forgiven and you may receive the promise that is from above.” After that, he exhorted them with many words and said, “Be saved from this evil generation.” Those who listened to his words were baptized and three thousand were baptized on that day.

What is baptism? Isn’t it enough just to believe in the Lord Jesus? Why must we be baptized? We are saved by the blood of our Lord Jesus. Only the blood can remit us from our sins. Water cannot remit us, cleanse us from our sins. Then why should we be baptized? What is the meaning of baptism? What is meant by: “saved through water”? It is not that our sins may be washed away because they were washed away by the blood of our Lord Jesus. It is to be saved from the world. God has already delivered us out of the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. By being baptized we act out our faith. We believe that we are dead to the world and we are now made alive unto God. That is the meaning of baptism. We, who have believed in the Lord Jesus and are baptized, are a separated people. God has delivered us out of the world unto Himself. That is what we are.

SEPARATED FROM EGYPT

When you look into the history of the children of Israel, you find that when God led them out of Egypt, He did not lead them by the normal way of traveling from Egypt to Canaan. There is a land route by which you can go from Egypt to Canaan. It was the route of the Philistines, but God did not lead them that way. Why? God said, “When they come out, if they should meet any warfare they might be discouraged and return to Egypt.” So in order to cut off the way back into Egypt God led them in a roundabout way, even through the Red Sea. After they crossed the Red Sea, Egypt was behind them. They could not go back anymore.

How God wanted His people to be out of Egypt and never to return! Unfortunately, when they traveled in the wilderness, even though they had come out of Egypt, again and again their hearts returned to Egypt. Oh, how they longed for the smelly things in Egypt—the garlic, the onions, and all these things! They forgot the hardship. They forgot they were under the sentence of death in Egypt. They only remembered all the fishes and all the smelly things of Egypt. Not only that, they even tried to choose their own leader to lead them back into Egypt. Thank God He did not allow them to do it. They wandered in the wilderness forty years until that whole generation passed away. Only with the second generation were they able to enter into the promised land.

I think this should always be a warning to us. We are those who are redeemed of the Lord, and God has separated us from the world. This is the will of God. But are we a separated people? That is the question.

THE WORLD

The Earth God Created

First of all, we need to understand what the Bible means by the word *world* or *cosmos*. In the Scripture it has various meanings. It can mean “the earth,” the earth that God has created and all the things on this earth. In Psalm 24:1 it says, “The earth is the Lord’s and all the fulness thereof, the world and they who dwell in the world.” In Hebrew one of the poetic expressions is to repeat the same thing with different expressions, with different words. So in Psalm 24:1 it says, “The earth is the Lord’s”; then it repeats, “The world and they that dwell upon it.” So here the word *world* means “earth,” the earth that God has created and all the things that are upon this earth. God created this earth for our enjoyment, for our sustenance, for our nourishment. God created the earth that we may take care of it, to till it that it may produce more, to rule over it that God may be glorified. That is our relationship with this earth.

People on this Earth

There is another meaning in the Bible for the word *world*. It means “people,” the people that are on this earth. John 3:16 is familiar to us: “God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here it says, “God so loved the world.” God not only loved the earth that He created, but He said, “Whosoever believes.” The world here means “the people,” the people that inhabit this world, who are on this earth. God loved the people of this earth. He loved us to such an extent that He gave His only begotten Son to us, that if we believe in Him we shall not perish but have everlasting life. So this is the second meaning of the word *world*.

An Organized System

Then there is another meaning for the word *world*, *cosmos*. *Cosmos* means, “something organized, a system, an organized system.” Satan, the enemy of God, tried to oppose God. So he organized the world into a system under his control in order to use it to oppose God’s purpose.

After God created this earth or recreated it, made it habitable, God gave it to man to take care of it. And yet when man sinned, he handed over the world that was under his dominion to Satan. So Satan actually is not the rightful ruler of this world. He is a usurper, but he is called the god of this world, the ruler, the prince of this world. He organized this world into a system that is opposing God’s purpose. Whether it is political, economical, educational, social, or even religious, he organized all of these into a system to oppose God, and it is from that world this God has separated us.

PROPER RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD

What is our proper relationship with the world? In the prayer of our Lord Jesus in John 17 He shows us our relationship with the world. First of all He said that His Father has given us to Him out of the world. We belonged to this world. Not only are we on this earth, but we belonged to this system. We were all under the dominion of the power of darkness that you find in Ephesians 2. But God has delivered us out of this world, out of this system, and has given us as His gift to His beloved Son. We thank God that He gave His beloved Son to us as His gift to us, but at the same time He gave us, redeemed people, as His gift, out of the world, to His beloved Son. So we belong to His beloved Son. We are God’s gift to His beloved Son. God has delivered us out of the world.

In the same prayer our Lord Jesus said, “I am going out of the world.” He was leaving this earth. He was leaving this whole system because He was returning to His Father. But He said, “They are still in the world.” We are out of the world yet still in the world. In other words, we are out of this world’s system that is opposing God, but we are still living on this earth. We are not only still living on this earth, but to a certain extent we are still under an environment that is opposing God.

We are living in a hostile world. We are living in a strange world. We are aliens, we are strangers, we are sojourners in this world. That is our situation today.

And yet again our Lord Jesus said, “They are out of the world, they are still in the world, but they are not of the world.” Isn’t that wonderful, that God has called us out of the world, we are still in the world, and yet we are not of the world! Yes, we still live on this earth. Yes, we still live under that hostile environment, and yet we do not belong to it. We are out of the world. We do not belong to this world system because we belong to the kingdom of the Son of God’s love, just like our Lord Jesus.

Our Lord Jesus came into this world. He was born as a child. He grew up under the dominion of the Roman Empire. He was even under Judaism at that time because He was born a Jew. Yet while our Lord Jesus was on earth it is so evident that He was not of the world. He was a heavenly Man living upon the earth. He was under the rule of the heavenly Father. He was not under the rule of any man—the Romans or the Jews. He was not under any system, whether the Roman system or the Jewish religious system. He did not belong; He was different. He lived a heavenly life upon this earth. One day, after He accomplished the work of redemption, He returned to heaven to His Father. But one day He is coming back again. That is our Lord Jesus.

The Lord said, “You should be the same way. You are in the world, but you are not of the world. You do not belong to this system. You belong to heaven, and you should live a life of heaven upon earth, separated, different.” But that is not the end. The Lord said again, “As You, Father, sent Me into the world, I also send them into the world. I sanctify Myself for them; sanctify them by Thy truth.”

What does that mean? It means that He has so delivered us out of this world, so sanctified us by His word that He is able to send us into the world. We are able to go to all the nations, from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the end of the earth to preach the gospel, to be a testimony of God to the people in the world and bring them into the kingdom of God. So in the high priestly prayer of our Lord Jesus He has shown us our relationship with the world.

OUT OF EGYPT INTO BABYLON

The question is: Where are we? Are we like the children of Israel? God delivered them out of Egypt and yet Egypt was still in their hearts. Or are we even worse than the children of Israel? God has delivered us out of the power of darkness and yet after we are saved, have we never left the world? Where are we? What is our relationship with the world today? Are we a separated people? How separated are we? The world is a terrible system. The children of Israel came out of Egypt, out of the world. The hearts of that first generation were still in the world, so they fell in the wilderness. By the grace and mercy of God the second generation entered into the promised land. But what happened after they were in the promised land? They were taken captive into Babylon. They came out of Egypt into Babylon, out of the world as it is into the religious world. They were still captured. How subtle is the world!

Brothers and sisters, where is our stand? Have we really come out of the world? Positionally we are, but experientially, in our daily life, are we a separated people? Are we different from the world? Are we still longing for the world? Are we still imitating the world? The world should imitate us, but instead we imitate the world. Where do we stand?

So the Lord has recently exercised my heart on this matter. To what extent have I really been delivered from this world? The apostle Paul said he would not boast of anything save Jesus Christ and His cross. He would boast of the cross only. Why? It is because so far as the world is concerned he is crucified to the world. So far as he is concerned the world is crucified to him. The cross stands in between, separating him from the world. Is that our testimony?

Let us go back to the very beginning. Let us retrace our steps to the day when the Lord saved us. Before we were saved, we belonged to the world. That is the reason why people want to belong; young people want to belong. We belonged to the world. We were no different than anybody else. We were under the power of darkness. We did not see what the world really is. We thought that the world was beautiful; it was sweet; it was precious. We longed for the things of this world. We wanted to get along; we wanted more and more of the world. And more and more we were like the rest of the people, deeply

sucked into this world that is passing. But thank God, the Spirit of God worked upon us. Our conscience was touched by the Spirit of God. We saw our sins. We saw that the wages of sin is death. We saw that there is no hope. We cried out. We found that we were under the tyranny of the power of sin. We were not free. We cried to God and, thank God, He opened our eyes. He drew us back to the cross, to Christ, our Lord Jesus. There He was crucified, and He bore our sins in His body. His blood was shed for the remission of our sins. We came to Him. We believed in Him, and, thank God, we were saved. We were free from the heavy burden of sin.

But is that all? Is that all that happened when you were saved? Is there no change? Don't you have a new life that is heavenly? Is there any sign that you are not of the world? Does the Holy Spirit ever convict you of the things of the world that you long for? Is there no dealing in your life that you can still go on with your old friends doing the same things as you did before? Are you seeking the same things as the people of this world are seeking and all the time the Spirit of God is silent? Can it be? Are you really saved?

Brothers and sisters, where are we? Why is it that we may be saved and yet we have no consciousness of the world? We still love the world. We still desire to be conformed to the world. Why?

CONSECRATION

Romans 12:1: "Therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God I beseech you to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God."

Any believer, anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus, anyone who has that new life in him, anyone who has the Spirit of God in him, cannot avoid the Lord's dealing with them in this matter of the world. It may be certain things that you love; things that you consider as your life. It may be certain people of the world that you love more than the Lord Himself. It may be a certain habit you have that you will not give up because you love it. It may be a certain relationship, a friendship, that the Spirit of God speaks to you about but you do not listen. I believe you must have experienced these things. But why is it that even though the Holy Spirit is prompting you and deep down in your heart you know there is something wrong, you will not give up, you will not change, you still love the world? Why? I think it is because there is a basic lack of consecration. When we are constrained by the love of Christ, when we think of the mercies of God, it should move our heart to give our whole being to the one who loves us so much. He gave Himself for us and we want to give ourselves to Him. That is consecration.

I am afraid, brothers and sisters, we are lacking in consecration. You may say, "Lord, I give everything to You," but you do not mean it. There is not that seriousness, that thoroughness, that you really are touched by the love of Christ. You cannot live for yourself anymore. You do not belong to yourself. You belong to Him, and His love constrains you to give your whole being to Him and say, "Lord, it is yours. It is not mine. I have no right to use my body. I have no right to use my time. I have no right to use all my relationships. You are the One who decides everything."

Have we consecrated ourselves to the Lord in an absolute way? Without such consecration your mind will not be renewed. And if your mind is not renewed you will still be conformed to this world because you find it is lovely; it is precious; it is life to you. You do not see the subtlety of the enemy, the real face of the world. You love it. And the Bible says, "If you love the world, the love for the Father is not in you." No one can serve two masters. You love the one and hate the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Friendship with the world is enmity with God. But we do not see it. We think we can love both. We love the Father; we love the world. But God says, "It is impossible." We think we can serve two masters. Are you wiser than God? God says, "No, you cannot do that." When you befriend the world, you become an enemy of God (see James 4:4).

Why do you not see it? Why is it that your view of the world is still the worldly view and not the Christian view? Why is it that you see the world, a mirage built by the enemy, but you do not see the

world in its reality? That is the world that crucified the Lord. And if it crucified the Lord, will it not crucify you too? Death is what it is trying to bring to you, but you do not see it. Why? It is because there is a lack of consecration. Unfortunately, many of God's people do not have a firm foundation. The Spirit of God is working in your life but you are neglecting it.

TOUCHED BY GOD'S LOVE

In order to be a separate people, I believe the most important thing is to go to the Lord and ask His love to touch you deeply. Then hand yourself over to the Lord, your whole being to the Lord, and let Him have absolute rule over your life. When you do that, things begin to happen. First of all, the Lord begins to touch the outside. These are the things of the world, and they are passing. "Love not the world nor the things of the world—the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life."

Then you find the Lord begins to touch you. In your life there might be something. Sometimes it is almost ridiculous because it may be a very small thing, but it is something that you love so much and you will not give it up. The Spirit of the Lord will touch you and say, "How about this thing? Will you give it up for Me?" Oh, how you struggle! You cannot. It may be a little jewel, maybe something else, a little thing.

I still remember many years ago when I was in Amoy in 1936. One day I was preaching on this matter of consecration and there was a medical doctor there. He had two hobbies. One hobby was that he raised Leghorn chickens, and the other was he raised orchids. These were his life. Nobody could touch them. If anybody touched his chickens or his flowers he would be so angry. That was his life. After he heard this message on consecration, that night he began to pray. He said, "Lord, I want to give everything to You." He began to hand over one thing after another, not generally but in detail. He handed over this and that and this and that until he felt that he had handed over everything to the Lord. Then he had a good night's rest. The next morning when he woke up, one of his Leghorn chickens had died. In the past this would have been unbearable, but this time when it happened he killed some more and fed us all. It was a small thing but the Lord was touching on this matter of the world.

What is your world? Is it some people that you love? Sometimes there are illegitimate things that you should give up but you won't. Sometimes there are even legitimate things, but when legitimate things pass His boundary and you love these more than the Lord, it is illegitimate and the Holy Spirit is jealous. He will deal with it.

He may deal with your friendships. You have some friends who are not believers and you used to do things with them. After you are saved they want you to go somewhere that you know you should not go, but because of friendship you go. They want to do certain things. You know you should not but because of friendship you will not give it up, and you go with them.

Brothers and sisters, where are you? Where is your testimony? Where do you stand? That is why, after you are saved, you should tell people you are the Lord's. If you make a stand, you will be saved from many troubles. They will know that you are different and they will not dare ask you to do it. Your friendship has to change. The things of this world—the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life—need to be dealt with by the Spirit of God to deliver you out of this world system so that the love of the Father may be in you.

THE WORLD HAS ITS FASHION

Gradually, as you walk with the Lord, the definition of the world system becomes clearer and clearer. It is not only the things of the world, but you will discover the world is a mold, a fashion. That is why the Bible uses the word "age." There is another word in Greek for age, *aion*. It means "a period of time characterized by certain moral characteristics." This is a wicked, evil age. This is an age that is perverse and yet it has its fashion; it has a current. The world is like a current that is running on. Whenever Paris has a new fashion, immediately the whole world will follow it to be in fashion. You do not want to be

considered as backward. You want to be fashionable. You want to be sociable. All the world is doing it. Why don't you do it?

THE WORLD IS A MOLD

The world is a mold. There is a fashion there, a current there. Sometimes the Lord may deal with us about the things of the world, but when it comes to that mold we find it difficult. Everybody is doing it. If you do not do it you will be odd. People will look at you and say, "You belong to the last century. You are not fashionable, not sociable; you are backward." Dare you be different? Why must we imitate the world? The world should imitate us. Why should we come out of Egypt and be taken captive into Babylon?

If our mind is really renewed we will look down upon these things, just like the apostle Paul. What he had considered as precious to him—his status, his achievements in Judaism, his own future—now he considered as dross, as loss for the excellency of the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD

Where are we? As you go on with the Lord you discover the world is not only things, it is not only a mold; it is a spirit. In I Corinthians 2, what we receive is not the spirit of the world but the Spirit of God. The world has a spirit. It is a spirit of pride, arrogance, self-centeredness, and rebellion. That is the spirit of the world. Because of this spirit there are strivings, envyings, and wars. And the spirit of the world has come into the church. People are striving against each other—striving for position, striving for power. They are arrogant, proud, self-centered, and rebellious. Oh, how this world is rebellious—rebellious against God, against anything that is authoritative. And the spirit of this world has entered into the church. May the Lord deliver us.

May we be a separated people, a people marked with the Spirit of the Lamb—humble, meek, lowly. Thank God, His Spirit is in us. He is working but we need to cooperate. We need to submit ourselves to Him. The word of the Lord is: "Come out from their midst and be separated. Touch not the unclean." And God said, "I will be a Father to you and you will be my sons and daughters," said the Lord Almighty.

Do you think the world will love you? This is false. The world hates you because you belong to the Lord. It is trying to entice you in order to kill you. This is true because we do not belong to the world. The world hates us. We will suffer; but remember, we have a Father. God says, "I will be your Father. I will take care of you. And you will be my sons and daughters; not just babies but sons and daughters. You grow up," says the Lord Almighty. May God bless us.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, we want to thank Thee for delivering us out of this evil world and yet, Lord, oftentimes our hearts still linger there. We do not see it as Thou seest it. At other times we are afraid to suffer, to be different. Lord, forgive us. We pray that Thy Spirit would deeply convict us and bring us to our knees that we may confess, that we may return, and that we may be restored. Oh Lord, we pray that Thou will build up a wall between us and the world. May the cross separate us from the world. Let the world see us as dead and we will see the world as dead. To the glory of God in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

FIRST PLACE IN ALL THINGS

Revelation 1:17-18—And when I saw him I fell at his feet as dead; and he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not: I am the first and the last, and the living one: and I became dead, and behold, I am living to the ages of ages, and have the keys of death and of hades.

Colossians 1:18-19—And he is the head of the body, the assembly; who is the beginning, firstborn from among the dead, that he might have the first place in all things: for in him all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell.

Matthew 6:33—But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

Shall we pray:

Dear Lord, we want to thank Thee for Thy amazing love towards us. We thank Thee for giving Thyself, Thy all to us. We thank Thee that Thou dost love us and love us to the very end. Thou has not withheld anything from us. Lord, we thank Thee for all Thy goodness and faithfulness. And as we gather before Thee, Lord, we just desire to hear Thy voice. Speak to our hearts. Reveal Thyself to us afresh. Draw us that we may run after Thee. Thou knowest each one of us. Thou knowest where we are. Thou knowest what we need. So Lord, do show Thy mercy to us. May Thy name be exalted. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.

In the three passages that we have just read you notice there is one word that happens in each of these passages, and that is the word *first*. The burden that the Lord has laid upon my heart is on this matter of priority, first place.

We live a very complex and complicated life on earth. Modern life is very complicated. There are so many things that we must do. There are great demands upon our time; and yet our time is so limited. We have only twenty-four hours a day. Not only that, but even our life span is so short.

THE DAYS COUNTED BY GOD

Moses, the man of God, said in Psalm 90:10: “Our days are threescore years and ten [70]; and if, by reason of strength, we may get to fourscore years [80], yet their pride is labor and vanity, for it is soon cut off and we fly away.”

That is how short our life is. Even though with modern hygiene people seem to be able to live a little longer, on the other hand it is being counter-balanced by the perplexity and complexity of modern life. The lives of those who lived in the early days were much easier. There were less demands, less interests. They had plenty of time, as it were, to meditate. But modern life is so pressing, so full that you hardly have time to think. We are faced with all these problems yet we remember that our life and our time are given by God. One day we will have to be before the Lord and answer how we used His gifts, whether we have used them wisely or used them foolishly.

Moses prayed, “Lord, teach us to number our days.” In other words, we need to have the wisdom to know how to spend our time, to spend it in such a way that it may be counted in eternity. We may live seventy or eighty years or more, but how many days are really counted by God? That is a question we need to ask ourselves. Do we use our time wisely according to the will of God? One day when we shall appear before Him, how many days of our lives will be counted? How many days will be just waste? This matter of priority becomes a very real, pressing question to every one of us, not just to those of age, but even for those who are just beginning in their lives.

OUR TIME BEFORE SALVATION

Before we were saved the god of this world had blinded our eyes. He had darkened our minds. So during those days our priority of life was all distorted. We could not see very far. All we could see was

this life, this world, this limited time. During those days our priority was set on the things of this world. How could we get the most of it? How could we enjoy everything that the world could give us? How could we satisfy, gratify ourselves? We were self-centered. We lived for ourselves and we wanted the best of everything during this short lifetime. That is where we were.

I remember a true story about a couple. The wife was a devout Christian, but the husband was not a believer. The wife loved her husband, so she tried her very best to persuade her husband to turn to the Lord. But it was to no avail. She did not know what to do, so she prayed, and the Lord gave her wisdom. Beginning from that time onward, she began to treat her husband very royally. She gave her husband the best of everything. When they ate, she always gave him the best food. In everything she always gave the best to her husband. After she had done this for a while her husband began to wonder: Why does she treat me this way? So one day her husband asked her: "Why do you always give me the best?"

"Well," the wife said, "it is all you can get. Your life is just for this world. You have no future. You have no hope. You have nothing. So I must give you everything while you can have it because if you do not have it now you will miss out." That touched his heart. Finally, the husband came to the Lord.

If you have only this world to enjoy, my advice will be to enjoy it to the uttermost. Eat and drink, for tomorrow you die. You have nothing else. But unfortunately, it is not true. Our life here is just on probation. God gives us a certain amount of days, of years. We are on probation and God wants to see how wisely or how foolishly we use our time because our time today is closely related to eternity. The way we spend our days today decides our future, our eternity. So it is not something that we can just throw away unwisely.

SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM

We who have been saved by His grace, we who are God's children, should certainly know better. How should we spend our days? Do we have a principle that governs us? How do we use our time? How do we divide our time? We need guidance. As you go to the word of God, you find that one of the names of God is: "I am the first." "I am the first" is God's name. His name is the first, but it is not just a vain name because that name represents a reality. He is the first. He is not only the first in creation; He is the first in redemption. He is the first in love. He is the first in giving. He is the first of everything. It is not just a name; it is a reality. In other words, He is the first of your life.

Is this true with us? Can you say that God is the first in your life? Are there many other things that seem to occupy the first place and God is somewhere at the last? That should not be. He *is* the first.

It is the will of God that His beloved Son should have the first place in all things. He is the first in creation and that is the reason why all creation was created in Him, by Him, and for Him. He is the first in redemption. He is the Head of the body of Christ, the first born from among the dead, the beginning of the church. And He has the first place in your life. That is God's purpose. God's purpose is that Christ will have the first place in your life. Is it true in your life?

God's word says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." In our seeking, are we like those who have no heavenly Father, who are anxious about what to eat, what to drink, and what to be clothed with? These are the necessities of life and we need all these things. But are we anxious about what to eat or drink and what to be clothed with as if we had nobody to take care of us? Where is our heavenly Father? He knows what we need and His command is: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." If your priority is right, all these things shall be added to you. They will follow.

The matter of priority is something that we need to decide at the very beginning of our Christian life. Of course, it is not too late if you have not done that and you have already been a Christian for a number of years. It is never too late. We need to set our priority as to what we really see is the most important in our lives.

MANY DEMANDS FOR OUR TIME

This life is so short and our days are so restricted, only twenty-four hours. There are many necessities. There are many demands. There are many legitimate needs. We need to have rest, eight hours of sleep. We need to work eight hours. And today, life is such that we may be asked to work ten hours instead of eight hours. And we need to eat which takes maybe two hours. So there is not much time left. Then there is the family to take care of. There are children to take care of. There are those in school, so you have lessons, You have many other extracurricular activities, and of course you need recreation. You cannot be under tension all the time. So you find that you are crowded with all these demands, and every demand seems to want your full time and your full strength. What are you going to do?

Our enemy is very wise. He is that old serpent. When Moses came to Egypt and told Pharaoh: “God said, ‘Let My people go that they may serve Me,’” what was Pharaoh’s reaction? He had already put these children of Israel to hard labor making bricks to build cities for him. But when Moses said, “God said, ‘Let My people go that they may serve Me,’” Pharaoh said, “These people have too much free time for themselves. That is why they want to go and worship. Increase their labor. They have to produce the right amount of bricks but do not give them any straw. Let them go and find the straw.” In other words, if you make them fully occupied they will think nothing of spiritual things. Everything will be just for this life—physical. There will be nothing spiritual. That is what the enemy says. That is what the enemy has been doing and that is what the enemy is doing today. Everybody who is working complains that formerly there was only eight hours of work. Now you have to work ten hours, maybe twelve hours; if not, you may be fired. That is the old trick of the enemy.

So you are faced with all these problems. On the one hand, we are faced with the necessities of life. On the other hand, the enemy is trying very hard to take away all your time so that you will have no time to think about God, no time to worship, no time to read your Bible, no time to pray, no time to meet. What are you going to do under these kinds of circumstances? The only solution is that you need to set your priority. If you do not have a priority and everything is equally important, do you know what will happen? You will just be driven by outward circumstances. When this demand comes, then you go for it. Then it begins to consume your time and energy until you are exhausted. And then another demand comes. In other words, you have no life principle. You have no purpose in life. You are just being swayed and changed by the outside powers and outside forces. Of course you do not enjoy living that kind of life, having no meaning, no purpose, just passively being driven by your outward demands or outward circumstances. Of course you do not want to do that. But if you set a wrong priority then you will be going in the wrong direction.

WRONG PRIORITY LEADS TO THE WRONG END

Think of Lot. He came out of Ur of Chaldea with his uncle, Abraham. He traveled with Abraham. He was blessed by God in being with Abraham, but then he set the wrong priority. He wanted the world. He was in Egypt once and whatever was like Egypt attracted him. The plain of Sodom and Gomorrah was like Egypt, so he made his choice. He moved his tent closer and closer until finally he stayed in the city of Sodom. This wrong priority led him to a wrong end, a pitiful end. The right priority sets you on the right path; it gives you a right living.

It is extremely important that we set our priority and set it right. We need to make a choice. There are many demands of life. There are many legitimate demands upon us, not to mention the illegitimate demands. When we are crowded with all these demands pressing upon us, we have to make a choice. We cannot treat everything equally. We do not have the energy nor do we have the time because everything demands our all. What are we going to do? We have to make the right choice. That is to say, what do you consider as the most important thing in your life? Who do you consider should have the first place in your life? That should be the principle that will decide all the rest of things.

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.” In other words, if you set the right priority all the other things will fall in place. You will find that everything will be taken care of that needs to be taken care of. Don’t you believe that?

THE PRINCIPLE OF OUR LIFE

What is your priority? Simply speaking, as God’s people, there is only one priority that we can set. What else can you set? Can you say that your own life is most important? Your life is not yours. You are redeemed. You belong to someone else, to the Lord. You may say, “My family is my first priority. Everything has to be governed by my family. When my family demands, I give it all.” Is that the right priority? Or you may even say, “My church is the first priority. I give everything to the church.” Then you neglect your family and your work. Is that right? Of course not!

Who should be your first priority? The word of God is so clear. God is the first. God’s will is that His Son have the first place. His command is: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” If we love Him we will keep His commandments. So what about you? What is your priority? What is the principle of your life? What is the guide to the use of your time? It is not just a matter of the amount of time; it is also a matter of the quality of time. How do you set your priority?

SEEING THE UNSEEN

In Hebrews 11 we are told that Moses grew up in the Egyptian palace. He was a prince adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter. He became great in the sense that he grew up and he was forty years old. The other sense is that according to tradition he became a great general in Egypt. Then one day he had to make a choice. He had to set his priority right. Was he going to just enjoy all the riches of Egypt? He might be the Pharaoh one day. Was he to seek all the pleasures of sin that Egypt could give? Or would he rather choose suffering with God’s people, the reproaches of Christ? He had to make a choice. What was his priority? He made the right choice. He would rather forsake all the riches and pleasures of Egypt. He chose the sufferings, the reproaches of Christ for he had seen the invisible, the unseen. Brothers and sisters, is the visible, the seen all that we can see? Do we see the invisible, the unseen?

Think of Daniel in his teens. He was taken as a hostage to a foreign country. And yet he was unexpectedly given the best opportunity that any young person could ever dream of. He was chosen to be educated and nourished for three years that he might stand before the king. What an opportunity! But this teenager decided in his heart, he purposed that he would not be polluted with the wine and the food of Babylon. He wanted to keep himself pure for God. What a choice! It was not easy because he was not free, but he had faith. And God answered his faith. The result was that God gave him great wisdom and understanding. What a future he had, not for himself, but for the glory of God! That is Daniel.

I know a brother who was a banker. He was also one of the greatest fortunetellers in China. He became a millionaire; he was a wicked man. But one day the Lord got hold of him and turned him completely around. He used to smoke seventy cigarettes a day, just one match. When he was eating, his servant would hold the cigarette for him. But on the day he believed in the Lord Jesus that was gone. He put a Bible on his desk in the office. Whenever people came in he would talk to them about the Lord. He went to the meeting not only on Sunday but also on other days for prayer, for Bible study, for different things. Whenever there was a meeting he would have no entertainment. A banker would entertain or be entertained by others every evening. But after he believed in the Lord he made it a point that if there was a meeting there was no entertainment. So of course his fellow bankers were surprised and said, “People worship only on Sunday. Why is it that you worship on Monday, you worship on Wednesday, you worship on Friday? Why do you do that?” (Now, according to Chinese we call every day worship—worship one, worship two, worship three, worship four, worship five, worship six, worship Sunday.) So he said, “Well, every day is worship.” A priority was set and by the grace of God he kept it.

How important it is that you have your priority right! Otherwise your life will be just drifting, just a waste. What a pity!

SETTING PRIORITY EARLY

I would like to say a few words to young people who are still in school, maybe high school or college. By the grace of God He saved me when I was in high school. When I went to college, I was not as fortunate as many young people today who have spiritual companions. Now, by the way, when you choose your college, how do you choose it? Is there a priority when you choose where to go? Is your criteria just to go to the best college? Do you consider whether there is a group of believers there that you can fellowship with? Are you thinking of your spiritual needs or do you just neglect all these things? This is a point you need to remember.

I did not choose my college because my father chose for me when I was sixteen. In China we are taught to obey our parents. I did not want to go but he wanted me to go. When I went there I discovered the whole atmosphere was so hostile to my Christian life. It was supposed to be a Christian college, but unfortunately, even many of the professors, who were missionaries from this country, did not believe the Bible. They did not believe that Jesus is the Son of God. I was shocked. So I withdrew myself. I was alone. My only comfort and strength was that every day I knelt before the Lord, read my Bible, and prayed in the dormitory. There were others in the same room but I did not care. I knelt there and read my Bible and prayed. That was my only lifeline to sustain me before the Lord.

I loved to study and as a student I felt that was my priority. My priority was to live for God, to glorify Him. I needed to study well, not for my own sake, not for my parent's sake, but for the glory of God. So that was my priority. But in God's arrangement, when I was a junior in college, the Lord began to raise up a company of believers. And even though I was so young, I was responsible for that meeting. The demand of time upon me was very great.

When the Lord began to gather us in that city, we were under great persecution, not from the world but from the Christian world. In a sense, I was put in responsibility. I spent lots of time in meetings and visiting. And because we were under great persecution it took lots of my time. But God was faithful. I had almost no time to study because I spent all my time in serving the Lord. But I always remembered that I had to study for the glory of God. Do you know what happened? When I put God first, He repaid me a hundred-fold. Oftentimes when I came back late at night, I was trying to study, lying on my bed with my books, but I fell asleep. At midnight my mother would come in and cover me. But the Lord multiplied a hundred-fold. When I had time to study I prayed: "Lord, I have no time to cover the whole book. Give me wisdom." And the Lord answered me. Every time I took an examination the answers were there.

I say this to encourage the young people. Even when you are a student do not think you are just a student and your priority is studying. Your priority is to go on and do everything the best, but it is for the Lord. It is not even for yourself; it is for the Lord. So seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.

Just a word of warning. If you think: "Well, that is fine; then I will not study anymore. I will just go to meetings and the Lord will give me a hundred-fold." You try it and you will fail. It is a matter of your heart. It is a matter of priority. It is a matter of what the Lord has ordered in your life.

PRIORITY IS A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

What is your priority? When demands come, how do you decide? Do you really put God first? Or do you put yourself first or your family first or even your church first? Who gets the priority? Who has the best of your time? Who decides which is more important than the others? If you put God first, all these things shall be added unto you.

How are you going to go about it? This matter of setting priority is not a legalistic thing. It is not a decision that you make legalistically or mechanically. No. It is a spiritual exercise. In other words, you need to exercise before the Lord on this matter of priority. You need to go to the Lord and lay this matter of your life and your time before the Lord. Lay this matter of all the demands in your life before the Lord and ask Him to give you an understanding from above, that the Lord may show you who He is.

What is His heart? What does He want you to do? What is His will for you? If you can see that He is the first, that He should have the first place in your life, that He wants you to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, then as your heart is moved by who He is and what He is, you make your decision. Give Him the priority. It is a spiritual exercise. After you have given Him the priority, then you ask Him to give you wisdom as to how to distribute your time.

You have a work to do; it is for the glory of God. You have a family to take care of; it is for the glory of God. You have lessons to study; it is for the glory of God. You need recreation; it is for the glory of God. You need to assemble with the saints; it is for the glory of the Lord. You lay these things before the Lord and ask the Lord to give you wisdom to distribute your time. It may change from time to time but the Lord will lead you. If you set your priority right the Holy Spirit will lead you in your daily life and guide you into all truth. As you go about your daily life, as you are faced with different demands and you have only a certain amount of time, what are you going to do? Which demand will you use your time for? The Holy Spirit will bring to your mind, apply the principle you have set, and He will work it out in the distributing of your time. It is a spiritual thing. It is not mechanical or technical. When you are guided daily by the Spirit according to the principle God has set in your life, your spiritual life will grow. You will be nourished and you will find in your decision that God is honored. It is true your flesh may suffer. It is true that sometimes you may even be misunderstood, but thank God, He is with you. That is the most important thing.

So do not just let your life drift. Your life needs to be governed by the inward principle. May the Lord help you to set your priority right as early as possible. Oftentimes, we who are older regret that we did not set our priority early enough. Lots of our time was wasted. It will not be counted before God; it is lost forever. May every moment count in the eyes of God. God bless you.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, our life is Yours; our time is Yours. Give us wisdom to set our priority right. Guide and lead us throughout our life that we may walk in Thy will. Bless Thy people. Keep Thy people. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.