

January 10, 2010

KEYS TO LIFE

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Matthew 6:33

Unfortunately, there are many people who think of Christianity as something old, negative, and prohibitive. For these people, religion does not give life; it takes life away, and they could not be more wrong!

What a gross misunderstanding of the Christian faith that is! We need to always remember that Christianity is good news! That’s what the word *gospel* means – “good news,” “glad tidings.”

God is not only a comfort, he is a joy. He is the source of all pleasure. He is light and laughter. He is the giver of life – real life, abundant life, full life, meaningful life, joyful life, eternal life. And our chief purpose is to celebrate him, and serve him, and enjoy him forever.

That’s what our text for today in Matthew 6:33 is all about. Let me translate it like this: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and everything else will fall in place for you.”

Do you remember that scene from Disney’s version of *Alice in Wonderland* in which a lock with legs is running around in panic? Frantically, the lock runs here, there, and everywhere. Finally, Alice says to the lock, “What are you doing? Why are you running around in all directions?” And the lock says, “I am seeking the key to unlock myself!”

Well, that is precisely what Jesus is giving us here in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6. He says: “Here it is! Here is the key that will unlock you. You don’t have to run around in a panic all the time. Here is the key to life. Just celebrate God as the King of your life and the Lord of all your relationships. Let that be your number one priority. Put that first, then everything else will fall into place for you and your life will be full of joy and zest and purpose and mission and meaning and fulfillment.”

Now then, let me break this down a bit and bring it closer to home with three thoughts.

THE FIRST KEY TO LIFE IS TO SEEK GOD’S WILL. We can pray to God about anything. We can talk to God about our joys and sorrows, our

victories and defeats, our blessings and our complaints, but the bottom-line prayer for the Christian is “Thy will, O God, be done.”

Have you heard about the man who decided to write a book on the great churches of America? He decided to take a long trip across the country visiting the churches firsthand. He started in California. He was looking around and making photographs of this church in San Francisco when he noticed a golden telephone on a wall. Underneath the phone was a sign that read, “\$10,000 per minute.” Intrigued, he found the church’s minister and asked about the golden phone. The minister said, “Oh, that’s a direct line to heaven and if you want to use it, you can talk directly to God.” “Thank you very much,” the man said, and he continued on his way. As he traveled across the country, he found the same golden phone with the same sign in Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Nebraska, and New York. At each site, he made the same inquiry about the golden phone and got the same answer.

Finally he arrived in Florida and behold! He saw the same golden telephone with a sign. But this time the sign read, “Free calls.” Fascinated, he found the minister and said, “Pastor, I’ve been all across the nation, and in many churches I found a golden telephone like that on the wall there. And in each state, I was told it was a direct line to heaven and that I could use it and speak directly to God for \$10,000 a minute. But here your sign reads, ‘Free Calls.’ Why is that?” The pastor smiled and said, “Simple, my son. You are in Florida now and it’s a local call from here!”

Now, that story is a little Florida humor. But the real truth is: it’s a local call anywhere. Wherever we are, we have a direct line to heaven. Wherever we are, God is available and accessible. Wherever we are, it’s a free local call! And we need to make lots of those calls seeking God’s will for our lives.

I love the story about a ninety-eight year old woman who prayed to God constantly. Once when asked to explain her prayer life to her pastor, she said, “Well, pastor, when it comes to prayer, here’s how I do it: I just say, ‘Now Lord, here’s what I want,’ then I tell him, ‘I want this, I want that, and the other,’ and then I say, ‘but, O Lord, have it your way ‘cause you’re a lot smarter than I am.’” This was just her down-home way of saying “thy will be done.”

And she was so right. God is so much smarter than we are. God can see the big picture so much better than we can. So the key to life is, first of all, to seek God’s will – and follow it.

THE SECOND KEY TO LIFE IS TO OBEY GOD’S WORD. As the old-timers used to say: “It’s in the Book!” The key to life³, the key to happiness, the key to morality, the key to ethics, the key to fulfillment can be found in the Bible, in the pages of Scripture. That’s why the Bible is so important for us. It’s our survival kit, our instruction manual, and our blueprint for building the kind of life God wants us to build. It has the answers we long for and the solutions we so desperately need to make life work. But our problem is that sometimes we are not sure we want God in the driver’s seat. So we neglect the teachings of Scripture. We either fail to trust what the Bible teaches, or worse, we choose not to do what the Scriptures command.

Some years ago, a television program preceding the Winter Olympics featured some blind skiers being trained to do slalom skiing, impossible as that sounds. Each blind skier was paired up with a sighted skier. The blind skiers were taught on the flats how to make left and right turns by following one command of their sighted skiing partners. When that was mastered, they would go up to the slalom slope where their sighted partners skied beside them shouting instructions at the appropriate moments: “Left!”.....”Right!”.....”Straight!” As they obeyed the commands, they were amazingly able to negotiate the difficult course and cross the finish line, depending solely on the sighted skiers’ word. It was either complete trust or complete catastrophe.

That is a great parable for the Christian life. In this world we are often blind about what course to take, which way to turn. We must rely on the word of the only One who is truly sighted: God himself. To avoid catastrophe, we follow his commands. His word gives us the direction we need to finish the course. So if you are wondering about something – “Should I do this or not?” – look at the Ten Commandments. If what you are contemplating violates any one of the Ten Commandments, then don’t do it.

So, if you are trying to make a decision – “Should I do this, that, or the other?” – look at Jesus, look at what he taught, look at what he stood for! If you cannot do what you are contemplating in the spirit of love, in the spirit of Jesus, then don’t do it!

There is a wonderful true story about an American professor who traveled to London some years ago to do some postdoctorate study. While there, he attended the University Church of Christ the King in London. Sunday after Sunday as he worshiped, he was touched deeply by the beauty of the music. Not only the

singing of the choir but also the singing of the congregation, especially from a cluster of people who sat near him in the back of the church.

One Sunday, he asked the minister who those people were. The minister told him that they were the cast of *Godspell* that was playing in London at that time. He said that many of those young people had had no acquaintance with the Christian faith before they got into the cast of *Godspell*. But now, night after night, they sang the words from the gospel, the words of *Godspell*. He said the words began working on them. And so they sought a place and a people who cared about those words, believed those words, followed those words, lived those words, and they found that place and those people at the church.

The point is clear: once you get the words, once you understand what is being said in the gospel, then you want to be a part of it. You want to share it and live it and sing it. So the key to life is to seek God's will and to obey God's word.

THE FINAL KEY TO LIFE IS TO LIVE GOD'S WAY. Leo Buscaglia told a wonderful story about a student he had at the University of Southern California (USC) some years ago. The student's name was Joel, and Joel was absolutely miserable. Joel felt useless and worthless and joyless. He was depressed. One day Joel told his professor, Buscaglia, how unhappy and how unfulfilled he was. In despair, Joel said, "There is not one thing in my life that is worthwhile." Buscaglia said, "Okay Joel, let's go make a visit." Buscaglia took Joel over to the convalescent hospital near the campus at USC. Inside there were many older people, lying on beds, staring at the ceiling. As they walked into that scene, Joel looked around and said, "What am I doing here? I don't know anything about gerontology." Buscaglia said, "Good. You see that lady over there on the bed? Go over and say hello to her." "That's all?" Joel asked. "Yes, just go over there and say hello."

So Joel went over to the woman and said hello. She looked at him suspiciously and asked, "Are you a relative?" Joel said, "No." And she said, "Good. Sit down."

So Joel sat down and they started to talk. Buscaglia wrote: "My goodness, the things she told him. She told him all kinds of things about love, about pain, about suffering, and even about approaching death and dying.....with which she had made her own peace. She knew all these things, but nobody cared to listen to her" (except now Joel).

Well, Joel started going to visit once a week. It was so regular that in the hospital they named that day “Joel’s Day.” Buscaglia said that the greatest day in his teaching career was when he was walking across campus one Saturday afternoon, and there was Joel, with thirty older people stretched out behind him. He was taking them to the coliseum to see a football game.

Somewhere in heaven God was smiling because that’s God’s way – to find your life, your joy, your meaning, and your mission by reaching out in love to help other people.

Jesus once put it like this: “Whoever will lose himself will find himself.” Friends, the key to life is to seek God’s will, to obey God’s word, and to live God’s way to make God the number one priority in your life!

Remember again Jesus’ words from Matthew and the Sermon on the Mount: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

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