

What's In First Place?

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Jesus Christ invites all men and women everywhere to place him in first place in their lives. His first recorded sermon contained the plea, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:33). The point is amplified in Paul's letter to the Colossians, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence [ΒΑΤΘΥΒΤ< from ΒΑΤΘΥΒΤ meaning 'that he might come to have first place in everything' (Arndt & Gingrich, 732)]. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church" (Col. 1:18-24).

Seven observations emerge from this text. One, Christ is in first place because he is the head of his body, the church. Two, Christ is in first place because it pleased the Father. Three, Christ is in first place because it pleased the Father to have all fullness dwell in him. Four, Christ is in first place because he made peace with God and man available through the blood of his cross. Five, Christ is in first place because man is reconciled to God in his body, the church. Six, Christ is in first place because the only way people can be holy and unblameable and unreprouable in the sight of God is to be in him and in his church. Seven, Christ is in first place because continued, unshakable faith in him brings the hope of the gospel of salvation to humanity.

In order to strike an unfavorable comparison that will allow an honest evaluation of some of the things that force Jesus out of first place, four popular alternatives will be examined.

Fame

The self absorbed person sees life as a stage from which the world eagerly watches his performance daily. One of the best verses that cautions against this disposition is Luke 6:26 where Jesus said, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets." In the book of Esther, Haman is the adversary of the Jews who plotted their demise (Est. 3:8), but paradoxically, his plans were thwarted by wise Mordecai and his younger, courageous cousin Esther. At last, Haman is hung on the gallows he prepared for Mordecai (Est. 8:9-10). Esther's counter attack involved asking the King Ahasuerus and Haman to attend a special feast she planned to give at which time she would expose Haman's plot to destroy her and all her people, the Jews. Note Haman's fanaticism for fame when he received the invitation, "When he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife. And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to morrow am I invited unto her also with the king" (Est. 5:10-12).

Fortune

An individual surely has "I" trouble when he sees life through the material possessions that may be gained instead of seeing the array of good uses to which those riches may be put. A man known only to us as "the rich fool" illustrates the trait. Jesus said, "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall *I* do, because *I* have no room where to bestow *my* fruits? And he said, This will *I* do: *I* will pull down *my* barns, and build greater; and there will *I* bestow all *my* fruits and *my* goods. And *I* will say to *my* soul, *Soul, thou* hast much goods laid up for many years; take *thine* ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich

toward God” (Lk. 12:16-21, emphasis added). Even those seemingly unsuccessful in gathering material goods and possessions may exhaust all their efforts to financially prosper at the expense of their soul by forsaking the assembly of the saints (Heb. 10:25), failing to study the Bible (II Tim. 2:15), and leading worldly lives (Jas. 4:4).

Fun

What was “the rich fool’s” pleasure? He said, “Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” Does this attitude ever characterize modern society! Today is not unlike the days of Micah the prophet who said, “If a man should go about and utter wind and lies, saying, ‘I will preach to you of wine and strong drink,’ he would be the preacher for this people!” (Mic. 2:11, ESV).

Family

Sadly, many do place their physical family above the Lord. Remember the excuses given by the two men when called into the service of the Master? In Luke 9:59-62, “And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” It is doubtful that the first man’s father was already dead, or he would have been busy taking care of the funeral arrangements when Jesus came by. Likely what he meant was when his father passed away he would consider serving Christ but not until! And, in just that way some are excusing themselves from putting Christ first today.

Conclusion

Every Christian would do well to evaluate whether he or she is distracted from Christ or dedicated to Christ. What is in first place in your life?