

“Following the Call” by Charles E. Moore

IV. Kingdom Priorities – God’s Kingdom First Ch. 43

Last week we discussed **Matthew 6:25-32** – “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father know that you need them.”

Howard Thurman said “We lay bare the personal concerns of our private lives; ...We ask nothing. We wait. We wait, our Father, until at last something of thy strength becomes our strength, something of thy heart becomes our heart, something of thy forgiveness becomes our forgiveness. We wait, O God, we wait.” What is **Thurman** saying here about waiting on **God**?

Matthew 6:25-32 – “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” What do you think this means?



Leonhard Ragaz (1868 - 1945) was a Swiss Reformed theologian and religious socialist.

“The Kingdom Of God is no religion but rather the abolishment of all religion. For many people this must be the most shocking thing that can be said, for from time immemorial (Very old. It describes something from a time so far in the past that no one can remember it, write it down, or trace how it started.) people have embraced in the word religion everything that their souls conceive as most holy.” What does the word “religion” mean to you?

Ragaz said: “What do we usually understand by the word religion? Certainly not the communion of the soul with God, but something else. More often than not, a person sees in the word “religion” a certain spiritual structure that can easily be described.” What is **Ragaz** saying here?

“In general, it is a characteristic of “religion” that in this fashion it creates its own image.” How does a religion create its own image? How can this be a positive thing? How can it be a negative thing? What are some examples?

“...all light and all darkness that inhabit the infinite reaches of the human soul find their strongest and fullest expression in religion. A large part of religious life has to do with the cultivation of these feelings...”. Why do feelings find expression in religions?

Feelings - represent the part of an emotional response that a person actually notices and identifies. They mix physical bodily signals (like a fast heartbeat) with thoughts and personal meaning.

What are some examples of feelings you may experience when participating in “religion”? Why?

“What **Jesus** wants is something quite different, virtually the opposite. We would have to say that already about **Israel**. **Moses** wanted no religion, and the battle of the prophets was a battle against “religion”.” What is **Ragaz** saying here? (See reverse A.)

Ragaz continues: “What did they want then? (Moses and Jesus) Not a religion, but rather a kingdom – the kingdom of God and people, a world of justice and goodness. In the name of God they stood against the temple and the priests for the lordship of God himself. Not only does he (**Jesus**) not bring a new religion, he does not bring any religion at all.” What is **Ragaz** saying?

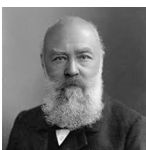
“He does not want a religion, but rather a kingdom, a new creation, a new world. He wants **God**, the people, the brother, a new justice, the liberation of the word from fear and sensuality, from mammonism, from despair, from death – and from religion. The old era is to pass and a new one is to come...”. How did the death of **Jesus** on the cross change everything?

“One doesn’t need a religion to serve this God. One serves him by serving people. Nowhere does Jesus give instruction regarding any special practices or works. With a smile he rejects fasting as a religious law, though on the other hand he does not forbid or condemn it.” What is **Ragaz** saying about **Jesus’s** relationship with religion and its law?

“Likewise, he does not establish a worship service – there is no trace of it. He does go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, but not to “build up” the synagogue. Rather, the synagogue is the place where **Israel’s** hopes are still represented; it is a community gathering, a place where the kingdom of **God** is discussed in some way, even though it is done under the cloak of religion.”

Why did **Jesus** go to the synagogue on the Sabbath? (See reverse B.)

“Religion ends because **God** is present. ...The world is truly his temple; therefore the special temple falls by the wayside. All people automatically become priests; therefore a special priesthood is not needed. All days become holy; therefore special holy days are not needed. Every deed becomes an act of worship; therefore worship services are no longer needed. Everything becomes holy; therefore nothing remains that is specially holy or unholy. Religion tumbles before **God**.” Why does religion tumble before **God**?



Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt (1842 - 1919) was a German Lutheran pastor and religious socialist. In 1899 he announced his support for socialism and joined the Social Democratic Party of Germany; for this, he lost his position as minister.

“The devil laughs up his sleeve at all our religious meetings and theology. Spiritual communities that fail to be corrective in everyday life and practical work will soon end in a fiasco, be they **Buddhist** or **Christian**.”

What is **Blumhardt** saying here? What does he mean by “corrective in everyday life and practical work”?

“Think more deeply about this. In **God’s** kingdom, **Christian** churches are done for, since they have become little more than egotistical worlds consisting of personal concerns that keep people apart.” What are some examples of this happening today?

“The misery of the masses can only be alleviated by forming associations of people who live by the **Holy Spirit** and freely lend practical help to one another. A people’s community that accomplishes something on the practical level will gain respect and authority among those who don’t believe. This may shock you, but we must preach that religious knowledge by itself is of no value. We need to keep the true goal in mind: the need of the world and the benefit of the people.” What is he saying we must do?

“That is the mind and spirit of **Christ** who reconciles all things. This is what we mean by “seeking first the kingdom of God.””

Reverse A.

Moses –

1. **Exodus 7–12** (the Ten Plagues and the contest with **Pharaoh's** magicians), which theologians view as a direct challenge to the pantheon of ancient Egyptian religion.
What was **Moses** battling when he confronted the **Pharaoh**?
2. **Exodus 32** during the Golden Calf incident. When the **Israelites** created an idol to worship while **Moses** was on Mount Sinai, **Moses** smashed the stone tablets of the covenant, destroyed the golden calf, ground it into powder, mixed it with water, and confronted the people and **Aaron** for turning to false worship.
What was **Moses** battling when he confronted the **Israelites**?

Jesus –

1. **Matthew 23:4**: **Jesus** accuses religious leaders of tying heavy, unbearable religious burdens on people's shoulders without helping them.
2. **Matthew 23:25-26**: He calls them hypocrites for cleaning the outside of a cup while the inside is full of greed and self-indulgence.
3. **Mark 2:27**: Defending his disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath, **Jesus** states, "**The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath,**" subverting rigid religious laws.
4. **John 2:14-16**: **Jesus** clears the temple in physical anger, overturning the tables of the money changers who turned a house of prayer into a marketplace.

What does this scripture have in common? Why?

Reverse B.

Jesus at the Synagogue on the Sabbath:

1. **Sharing the Message**: The synagogue served as the main gathering place in every town. It gave **Jesus** a ready audience of local people to preach the good news of God.
2. **Reading Scripture**: As a respected visiting teacher or rabbi, he was often handed the scrolls to read out loud and explain passages from the Torah and the Prophets.
3. **Healing the Needy**: **Jesus** often used the Sabbath gatherings to show **God's** mercy by healing sick or suffering people, teaching that doing good and saving life fits the true meaning of the Sabbath.

How did **Jesus's** teachings about the Synagogue and the Sabbath differ from the religious leaders of the time?