

Of Stars and Lilies
Presented by Peter Serger at the
Gospel Fellowship Church on July 10, 2005

Foreward

Peter Serger is a 21-year-old college student who has a deep passion for God and walking faithfully in the ways of God. It is clear to me that he has the combination of passion, compassion, focus, determination and oratorical skill that will catapult him into leadership in the emerging church of his generation. He is very much aware that he still has much to learn, as we all do, and he is an eager learner. I offer his sermon on my Edgework website to demonstrate that God continues to raise up earnest and passionate persons who will lead the church into the future. I encourage readers to interact with Peter in a way that will encourage him to keep growing and becoming all that he can be.
- Jack Heppner.

Do you remember the fireworks on Canada Day? How spectacular they were? How they lit up the sky? How they lasted mere seconds and then faded away? How they gave little moments of entertainment but left no lasting fulfillment. How you wished there weren't such long delays between displays. And how disappointed you were that they weren't better than they were and didn't last as long as you expected?

How many of you looked past the fireworks and tried to see the stars beyond them in the heavens? In the moments between the fireworks displays you could perhaps see a few stars, although the glowing residue in your eyes caused you to miss most of their glory. How many of you have not at one point or another seen the stars clearly. Have you ever dared to complain about their majestic beauty? And yet, even though you frequently complain about the fireworks, nevertheless each year on Canada Day you go faithfully to indulge in the spectacle. How frequently we do things that have less than fulfilling and lasting results all the while complaining about them.

Most of us claim to be searching for God but find ourselves staring at the blinding fireworks of this world. Fireworks filled with lies and sponsored by the media. Fireworks that keep us from seeing the true glory of God. And even when the fireworks fade for a moment, it seems we still cannot see God. All we see are the images of the fireworks burned into our eyes. So when the fireworks with all their lies are gone we are left with disappointment, mistrust, and hopelessness.

Can we ever see the glory of the stars through the fireworks or must we turn away from them to look at the stars directly. If we turn to focus on the stars, the flashes of the fireworks may still be reflected on the ground before us and their noise will still echo in our ears. That is to say that temptations will be with us as long as we live in this world. But we can keep our eyes focused on the stars - on God and on his kingdom.

Today, my brothers and sisters, I wish to challenge us as the church and as individuals. The reality of the challenge I have in my heart is very difficult for me to accept, just as I believe it will be difficult for you. But my friends, my fellow beloved, I refuse to give up on the one thing that I know is true and worth everything, and that is the presence of the Holy Father, His Spirit and his most loving Son, Jesus Christ.

Today is a new day. Just as yesterday was a new day in its time. And as tomorrow may be a new day in moments yet to come. Each and every day has value because in each day there are men and women striving to be perfect just as their heavenly father is perfect. Many men and women, more valiant and righteous than I, have lived in the past and will live in the future. Just as a lily takes root in the soil, so I must take root in the past - in the things others have learned before me. And I must be alert to the things that have led people astray. It is important to note that without each and every day's valuable acts of growth the lily would never take root, nor would it grow a stem or leaves or a blossom - and most certainly it would never grow into a glorious flower. So as a lily, I must grow each day as I look towards the time of blossom - the full glory, the eternal home.

I hope these two analogies – that of looking beyond the fireworks toward the stars, and like a lily, taking root in the past, growing in the present, and blossoming in the future – inspire us to move forward on a journey that has uncertainties connected with it but also fulfilling rewards.

In 1989 the Czechs of the Soviet Union revolted and declared their new-found nation a place of truth as opposed to the lies and propaganda of the former Soviet Union. And in the “Charter 77 Movement” they boldly declared that, “Truth prevails for those who live in truth.” Just as it can be said that lies prevail for those who live in them and distractions and fireworks prevail for those who live in them.

Listen carefully what is happening as I read Matthew chapter 6:19-34.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be.

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

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 important than food, and the body more important 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? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies 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, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 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.

Jesus starts off Matthew chapter six by saying that all our righteous acts should not be done before men but before him alone. He tells us how to pray to him. He tells us not to store up treasures on earth - be they material possessions or honor or ranking - but to store up rewards in heaven. He declares that where our treasure is - be it on earth, be it in our mind or be it in heaven - that is where our heart and devotion will be. He says that man cannot serve God and money. So choose you this day whom you will serve.

He goes on to say how tomorrow does not matter, for it is only by grace that we have each and every moment of today and that today has enough things for us to be concerned about. And oddly enough, tomorrow may never come. And then Jesus climaxes this section of teaching with the well-known saying, ***But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*** Seek him first. His love. His commands. His righteousness. And look towards the blossoming of the kingdom. If I am totally obedient today, then I don't have to worry whether tomorrow will ever come. But if I worry about tomorrow, it has - in a sense - already come, and today has already passed me by.

So, using the analogy we began with, we must seek the stars instead of being enamored with the fireworks. And all the things we need - not necessarily the things we want - will come to us as well. This is what I want to share with you for it is in my heart. **First of all** - not after I have had supper, or after I have worked to provide for my family, or after I have watched the sitcom on TV. Not after I have cleaned the house, or after I have done my hair, or gone shopping or watched a movie with friends or played the latest computer game. Not after I have served in the church or sold everything and given it to the poor or witnessed to a pre-Christian. Not after I have been an example of love to my family or have gone to the washroom. We must seek God **first of all**. Seek his face. Seek his glory. Seek his Son, his Spirit and his love. And then all the rest will fall into place. My friends this is my passion for us as a church - leaving all things of this world to seek Him.

In a sense we are to become nothing before God, to be silent before God and trust that he will lead us. We must become free before God, and this my friends, is prayer. Not that we use our mouths or our minds to proclaim the things about us and our world. But to listen and look to God in silence. "Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name."

A unique theologian who live in the early 1800's, named Soren Kierkegaard, once wrote the following. *This the true man of prayer knows well, and he who was not the true man of prayer learned perhaps precisely this by praying... In proportion as he became more and more earnest in prayer, he had less and less to say, and in the end he became quite silent... He learnt that to pray is not merely to be silent but to hear ...Not as though prayer always began with silence but it began by seeking first God's kingdom.*

I am very good at justifying my actions and my possessions. And I can also use the Bible to justify my unrighteousness. But this is wrong! It is contempt towards God. Yet this is what we as a church have been doing for far too long. We claim that God wants us to go to work eight hours a day, five days a week, because this is the way he provides for us. Now before I appear to you to be an irrational extremist, let me say that God may want some of us to work like this. He may want all of us to work to provide for ourselves and our families. In fact working for our daily bread is part of being human.

On the other hand, are we aware of what comes with spending our time as slaves of money? I know that the amount of money I make each day is far more than the amount I need. But I justify this as being okay since I will use that extra money to serve God. Yet, if truth be told, more than most of that money gets wasted on my own selfish indulgences. How dare I use something that I claim God has blessed me with for my own selfish purposes? That is not the will of God. For just as ***the love of Money is the root of all evil***, selfishness is what makes money dangerous.

Sometimes I come home from work tired. So I reject God and rent a movie that ironically is full of lies and deceit that infiltrate my mind. How much better would it be if I went to read my Bible for the same amount of time? Yet how little I do it. I challenge you, before you watch a movie, take note of how long it is, then talk to God first for that amount of time. Then watch the movie - that is if you can let go of the love God will show you in your conversation with him.

People say that cleanliness is next to godliness. What a horrific lie. Godliness is being pure in heart whereas cleanliness is an act restricted to earth – a state that never endures. As for providing for your family, what is more important, that you provide food for the body or food for the soul? That you present an example that revolves around obtaining earthly rewards or an example quite contrary to this world that revolves around obtaining invisible rewards, rewards of the heart, rewards in relationships and rewards in heaven with God.

I fear I may have stepped on some toes and gone too far. Yet I can't withhold this conviction. This world is full of lies that have held me for far too long. I have traveled to Mexico, to Bolivia, to the natives in the inner city of Winnipeg and to the native reserves up north. I have been to several countries in Europe as a tourist. But most importantly, I have spent most of my life here in Canada, which for six years running was rated by the UN as the best place in the world to live - the most secure and the most wealthy, the freest and the most rewarding. And within this country, I live here in Steinbach - a clean

and proper town where wealth and prosperity and success abound. And we say we have a good life here.

But I fear we have been blinded by our good life. Our minds have been numbed by the onslaught of lies that infiltrate our minds via the media of our society. Why is the church in South America and Africa growing more rapidly and why is it stronger than the church in Canada that seems to be dying? I believe it is based on the fact that Christians in those countries spend much of their time in jails sharing with others who are like they used to be. They are out on the streets living with and helping the street kids. And those Christians are preaching from the Word of God. For them it often is a physical war against poverty, drugs, gangs, and violence. But my friends, ours is a much more dangerous war. It is a war of the mind. And sadly it is a war we are losing.

I have seen Christians in other places doing great things and I have heard their testimonies. They claim to be baby Christians but in fact stand taller than mountains. They work harder and much longer hours than we do but still have time for loving others because they see loving others as their primary work. Let us make our work loving others and let us seek God first and he will provide for us.

We must be alert so that we don't give in to white lies and half measures. I refer again to Kierkegaard, and I quote: *There is one thing the lilies and the birds absolutely do not understand, namely half-measures - which, alas, most men understand best. That a little disobedience, that this might not be absolute disobedience, is something the lilies and the birds cannot and will not understand. That the least, the very least disobedience, might in truth have any other name than... Contempt of God. That the lilies and the birds cannot and will not understand.*

Satan will attack at the point of our ambivalence. He will try to bring us down to the ground into rubble through our ambivalence. So let us seek Christ first so that ambivalence will vanish. Let us fight together the lies of this world. Let us as Christians revolutionize our nation and stop letting these horrible lies lead our nation and force us into compliance and acceptance. How did gay marriages, abortion and million dollar scandals enter a country who's foundation was the Bible and who's national anthem is in fact a hymn that glorifies our God?

We are the Church and we are alive. I have seen, within this church, growth that passes understanding. Let us not stop because we are satisfied that we have grown but instead let us continue to grow. Let us continue to flee the lies of our society that tell us who we are, how we are to act, what we are to believe. Let us flee the things that block our vision of the stars and of God and let us walk the path set before us. The narrow road. The one less traveled. The difficult and challenging one. The road on which we cannot survive alone. Let us together hold on to Christ's hand and continue to walk. If we do, we will win the race and we will not grow weary - we will not grow faint. We will fly on the wings of an eagle - no, on the wings of angels we will fly. Free at last from the world, we will fly into the holy and blessed arms of the One who so dearly loves us. The one who dared to send

his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our very souls. Let us live like our Beloved lived among us. And let us seek Him first, above all things.

Yet my friends, do not just listen to me but look to the great people of the Bible and those who have lived throughout the history of the Church. Look to Moses who was called from a life of privilege as a prince to lead the Israelites out of captivity. And take note how God provided for them even when they grumbled against him. Look to the prophets like Elijah, Nehemiah, Daniel and Jonah, all were persecuted by the worldly and yet remained true servants of the Lord.

Look to the kings of the Old Testament. How David, for example, was a man after God's own heart even though he fell into sin with a woman he should not have had. How Solomon was granted great wisdom but whose downfall was his wealth. Look at their lives. They looked to God first and God blessed them and used them even though it was hard for them to remain pure. If it was hard for a man after God's own heart to stay pure and free from the lust of the flesh, how much harder is it for me, a young and struggling man, to stay pure and free from the evil desires of this world.

But most of all, look to Jesus - how he walked and how he served his Father. Very frequently he would leave his teaching and preaching and first go seek his Father. Just before his death he spent hours in the garden praying to God for strength to do the things that God had set before him. And look at Jesus' disciples, how even a man who followed Jesus closely still fell into the trap of lies and deceit this world had set for him - for a mere thirty pieces of silver.

Then look at the brothers and sisters of the early Church. They lived communally, each providing for others' needs as well as his own. In such a context there was a reduced temptation to lust after and hoard possessions.

Now look to the faithful in the first centuries of the church. Men like St. Augustine and St. Francis of Assisi. Men who are counted as holy because they left the things of the world so they could serve the Lord more fully. They sought the face of God first in quiet solitude and then ministered to those around them. Finally, look to Menno Simons, the man whom we call our founding father - how, because he sought God first, believed in living a simple and holy life - set apart for God.

Let us take root in these people - the wise people of the past. And let us note the dangers and temptations they faced so we can guard ourselves against evil. Let us draw wisdom from their lives and build our foundation upon their example.

But moving beyond the past, let us look to the future. In the book of Revelation, John reveals to us a time that will not end. A time to live with God in glory, holy and set apart in his love - a place to fully blossom in splendor. But even now, let us look forward to the things that will come to pass in our lives, to the hearts we will touch and to the lives we will help lead to the truth. Let us look to where we wish to take our church, to the places near to the end of our journey.

My Friends, building on the past and looking to the future, we live today, and the only thing that matters is what we do right now. Right now is the only moment that we have. The only thing that matters right now is whether we are this moment taking steps toward our goal. Whether we are seeking first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. Then when tomorrow comes, all the rest will come. But now, my friends, what are we doing now. Let us live as a community, as a body. Let us seek him first so that we may grow into the beautiful lily God has intended us to be and see the glorious stars that God wants us to see.

I cannot change your lives but I will do my best to help you if you want. I ask that you also help me because I want to change and grow and seek Him first. We must voluntarily give up our lives to God and let go of all things so that we can be free to seek him. Together we can stand and together we will have victory in Him.

As Kiekegaard puts it, Voluntarily to give up all is Christianity... It is actually true that Christianity requires the Christian to give up and forsake all things. But in fact Christianity is also the religion of freedom. It is precisely the voluntary which is the Christian. Voluntarily to give up all is to be convinced of the glory of the good which Christianity promises.

Let us give up all together - as friends, as brothers and sisters, as co-workers in the Kingdom of God, and as the beloved of our wonderful bridegroom. This is the challenge I give to the church today – to all of us. Let us ***seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*** together.

I leave you with a vision for the church as expressed by Vernard Eller in his book “The Simple Life”. He writes, and I quote; *This is something that the Church could provide: the opportunity for seeking Christians to get together in intimate fellowship for the purpose of sharing with, challenging, and even disciplining one another in a mutual search for the life style that can best express the relationship to God that takes priority over all else.*”

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