**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**LUKE-045**. **ANXIOUS ABOUT EARTH, OR EARNEST ABOUT THE KINGDOM by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"22. And He said unto His disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. 23. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. 24. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? 25. And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? 26. If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? 27. Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 28. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to-day in the field, and to-morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith! 29. And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. 30. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. 31. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall he added unto you."*

*Luke 12:22-31*

The parable of the rich fool was spoken to the multitude, but our Lord now addresses the disciples. Thereforeconnects the following with the foregoing teachings. The warnings against anxiety are another application of the prohibition of laying up treasure for self. Torturing care is the poor man's form of worldliness, as luxurious self-indulgence is the rich man's. There are two kinds of gout, as doctors tell us--one from high living, and one from poverty of blood. This passage falls into two parts--the prohibition against anxious care (vs. 22-31), and the exhortation to set the affections on the true treasure (vs. 31-34).

**I. The first part gives the condemnation of anxiety about earthly necessities.**

The precept is first stated generally, and then followed by a series of reasons enforcing it. As to the precept, we may remark that the disciples were mostly poor men, who might think that they were in no danger of the folly branded in the parable. They had no barns bursting with plenty, and their concern was how to find food and clothing, not what to do with superfluities. Christ would have them see that the same temper may be in them, though it takes a different shape. Dives and Lazarus may be precisely alike.

The temper condemned here is self-consuming care, the opposite of trust. Its misery is forcibly expressed by the original meaning of the Greek word, which implies being torn in pieces, and thus paints the distraction and self-inflicted harrassment which are the lot of the anxious mind. Prudent foresight and strenuous work are equally outside this prohibition. Anxiety is so little akin to foresight that it disables from exercising it, and both hinders from seeing what to do to provide daily bread, and from doing it.

The disciplesdanger of being thus anxious may be measured by the number and variety of reasons against it given by Jesus. The first of these is that such anxiety does not go deep enough, and forgets how we come to have lives to be fed and bodies to be clothed. We have received the greater, life and body, without our anxiety. The rich fool could keep his goods, but not his soulor life. How superficial, then, after all, our anxieties are, when God may end life at any moment! Further, since the greater is given, the less which it needs will also be given. The thought of God as a faithful creatoris implied. We must trust Him for the more; we may trust Him for the less.

The second reason bids us look with attention at examples of unanxious lives abundantly fed. Perhaps Elijah's feathered providers, or the words of the Psalmist (Ps. 147:9), were in Christ's mind. The raven was one of the uncleanbirds, and of ill omen, from Noah's days, and yet had its meat in due season, though that meat was corpses. Notice the allusions to the preceding parable in sow not, neither reap, and in neither have storehouse nor barn. In these particulars the birds are inferior to us, and, so to speak, the harder to care for. If they who neither work nor store still get their living, shall not we, who can do both? Our superior value is in part expressed by the capacity to sow and reap; and these are more wholesome occupations for a man than worrying.

How lovingly Jesus looked on all creatures, and how clearly He saw everywhere God's hand at work! As Luther said, God spends every year in feeding sparrows more than the revenues of the King of France.

The third reason is the impotence of anxiety (ver. 25). It is difficult to decide between the two possible renderings here. That of a cubitto the staturecorresponds best with the growth of the lilies, while agepreserves an allusion to the rich fool, and avoids treating the addition of a foot and a half to an ordinary man's height as a small thing. But age is not measured by cubits, and it is best to keep to stature.

At first sight, the argument of verse 23 seems to be now inverted, and what was moreto be now least. But the supposed addition, if possible, would be of the smallest importance as regards ensuring food or clothing, and measured by the divine power required to effect it, is less than the continual providing which God does. That smaller work of His, no anxiety will enable us to do. How much less can we effect the complicated and wide-reaching arrangements needed to feed and clothe ourselves! Anxiety is impotent. It only works on our own minds, racking them in vain, but has no effect on the material world, not even on our own bodies, still less on the universe.

The fourth reason bids us look with attention at examples of unanxious existence clothed with beauty. Christ here teaches the highest use of nature, and the noblest way of looking at it. The scientific botanist considers how the lilies grow, and can tell all about cells and chlorophyll and the like. The poet is in raptures with their beauty. Both teach us much, but the religious way of looking at nature includes and transcends both the others. Nature is a parable. It is a visible manifestation of God, and His ways there shadow His ways with us, and are lessons in trust.

The glorious colours of the lily come from no dyer's vats, nor the marvellous texture of their petals from any loom. They are inferior to us in that they do not toil or spin, and in their short blossoming time. Man's days are as grass; as a flower of the field so he flourisheth; but his date is longer, and therefore he has a larger claim on God. God clothes the grass of the fieldis a truth quite independent of scientific truths or hypotheses about how He does it. If the colours of flowers depend on the visits of insects, God established the dependence, and is the real cause of the resulting loveliness.

The most modern theories of the evolutionist do not in the least diminish the force of Christ's appeal to creation's witness to a loving Care in the heavens. But that appeal teaches us that we miss the best and plainest lesson of nature, unless we see God present and working in it all, and are thereby heartened to trust quietly in His care for us, who are better than the ravens because we have to sow and reap, or than the lilies because we must toil and spin.

Verse 29 adds to the reference to clothing a repeated prohibition as to the other half of our anxieties, and thus rounds off the whole with the same double warning as in verse 22. But it gives a striking metaphor in the new command against being of doubtful mind. The word so rendered means to be lifted on high, and thence to be tossed from height to depth, as a ship in a storm. So it paints the wretchedness of anxiety as ever shuttlecocked about between hopes and fears, sometimes up on the crest of a vain dream of good, sometimes down in the trough of an imaginary evil. We are sure to be thus the sport of our own fancies, unless we have our minds fixed on God in quiet trust, and therefore stable and restful.

Verse 30 gives yet another reason against not only anxiety, but against that eager desire after outward things which is the parent of anxiety. If we seek afterthem, we shall not be able to avoid being anxious and of doubtful mind. Such seeking, says Christ, is pure heathenism. The nations of the world who know not God make these their chief good, and securing them the aim of their lives. If we do the like, we drop to their level. What is the difference between a heathen and a Christian, if the Christian has the same objects and treasures as the heathen? That is a question which a good many so-called Christians at present would find it hard to answer.

But the crowning reason of all is kept for the last. Much of what precedes might be spoken by a man who had but the coldest belief in Providence. But the great and blessed faith in our Father, God, scatters all anxious care. How should we be anxious if we know that we have a Father in heaven, and that He knows our needs? He recognises our claims on Him. He made the needs, and will send the supply. That is a wide truth, stretching far beyond the mere earthly wants of food and raiment. My wants, so far as God has made me to feel them, are prophecies of God's gifts. He has made them as doors by which He will come in and bless me. How, then, can anxious care fret the heart which feels the Father's presence, and knows that its emptiness is the occasion for the gift of a divine fullness? Trust is the only reasonable temper for a child of such a father. Anxious care is a denial of His love or knowledge or power.

**II. Verses 31-34 point out the true direction of effort and affection, and the true way of using outward good so as to secure the higher riches.**

It is useless to tell men not to set their longings or efforts on worldly things unless you tell them of something better. Life must have some aim, and the mind must turn to something as supremely good. The only way to drive out heathenish seeking after perishable good is to fill the heart with the love and longing for eternal and spiritual good. The ejected demon comes back with a troop at his heels unless his house be filled. To seek the kingdom, to count it our highest good to have our wills and whole being bowed in submission to the loving will of God, to labour after entire conformity to it, to postpone all earthly delights to that, and to count them all but loss if we may win it--this is the true way to conquer worldly anxieties, and is the only course of life which will not at last earn the stern judgment, Thou fool.

That direction of all our desires and energies to the attainment of the kingdom which is the state of being ruled by the will of God, is to be accompanied with joyous, brave confidence. How should they fear whose desires and efforts run parallel with the Father's good pleasure? They are seeking as their chief good what He desires, as His chief delight, to give them. Then they may be sure that, if He gives that, He will not withhold less gifts than may be needed. He will not spoil the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar, nor allow His children, whom He has made heirs of a kingdom, to starve on their road to their crown. If they can trust Him to give them the kingdom, they may surely trust Him for bread and clothes.

Mark, too, the tenderness of that little flock. They might fear when they contrasted their numbers with the crowds of worldly men; but, being a flock, they have a shepherd, and that is enough to quiet anxiety.

Seeking and courage are to be crowned by surrender of outward good and the use of earthly wealth in such manner as that it will secure an unfailing treasure in heaven. The manner of obeying this command varies with circumstances. For some the literal fulfilment is best; and there are more Christian men to-day whose souls would be delivered from the snares if they would part with their possessions than we are willing to believe.

Sometimes the surrender is rather to be effected by the conscientious consecration and prayerful use of wealth. That is for each man to settle for himself. But what is not variable is the obligation to set the kingdom high above all else, and to use all outward wealth, as Christ's servants, not for luxury and self-gratification, but as in His sight and for His glory. Let us not be afraid of believing what Jesus and His Apostles plainly teach, that wealth so spent here is treasured in heaven, and that a Christian's place in the future life depends upon this among other conditions--how he used his money here.