

J.C. Ryle:

These verses are a striking example of the combined wisdom and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ's teaching. He knows the heart of a man: He knows that we are always ready to turn off warnings against worldliness, by the argument that we cannot help being anxious about the things of this life. "Have we not our families to provide for? Must not our bodily wants be supplied? How can we possibly get through life if we think first of our souls?" The Lord Jesus foresaw such thoughts, and furnished an answer.

He forbids us to keep an anxious spirit about the things of this world. Four times He says "Take no thought." About life, about food, about clothing, about the morrow, "take no thought." Be not overcareful: be not over anxious. Prudent provision for the future is right: wearing, corroding, self-tormenting anxiety is wrong.

He reminds us of the providential care that God continually takes of everything that He has created. Has He given us "life"? Then He will surely not let us want anything necessary for its maintenance. Has He given us a "body"? Then He will surely not let us die for want of clothing. He that calls us into being will doubtless find meat to feed us.

He points out to us the uselessness of over-anxiety. Our life is certainly in God's hand; all the care in the world will not make us continue a minute beyond the time which God has appointed. We cannot add one hour to our lives: we shall not die till our work is done.

He sends us to the birds of the air for instruction. They make no provision for the future: "they sow not, neither do they reap;" they lay up no stores against time yet to come; they do not "gather into barns;" they literally live from day to day on what they can pick up, by using the instinct God has put in them. They ought to teach us that no man doing his duty in the station to which God has called him, shall ever be allowed to come to poverty.

He bids us observe the flowers of the field. Year after year they are decked with the gayest colours, without the slightest labour or exertion on their part: "they toil not, neither do they spin." God, by His almighty power, clothes them with beauty every season. The same God is the Father of all believers: why should they doubt that He is able to provide them with raiment as well as the "lilies of the field"? He who takes thought for perishable flowers, will surely not neglect the bodies in which dwell immortal souls.

He suggests to us that over-carefulness about the things of this world is most unworthy of a Christian. One great feature of heathenism is living for the present. Let the heathen, if he will, be anxious: he knows nothing of a Father in heaven; but let the Christian, who has clearer light and knowledge, give proof of it by his faith and contentment. When bereaved of those whom we love, we are not to "sorrow as others who have no hope." (1 Thess. 4:13.) When tried by anxieties about this life, we are not to be over-careful, as if we had no God, and no Christ.

He offers us a gracious promise as a remedy against an anxious spirit. He assures us that if we "seek first" and foremost to have a place in the kingdom of grace and glory, everything that we really want in this world shall be given to us: it shall be "added" over and above our heavenly inheritance. "All things work together for good to them that love God." "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." (Romans 8:28; Psalm 84:11.)

Last of all, He seals up all His instruction on this subject by laying down one of the wisest maxims. "The morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." We are not to carry cares before they come: we are to attend to today's business, and leave tomorrow's anxieties till tomorrow dawns. We may die before tomorrow: we know not what may happen on the morrow; this only we may be assured of, that if tomorrow brings a cross, He who sends it can and will send grace to bear it.

In all this passage there is a treasury of golden lessons. Let us seek to use them in our daily life: let us not only read them, but turn them to practical account; let us watch and pray against an anxious and over-careful spirit. It deeply concerns our happiness to do so. Half our miseries are caused by fancying things that we think are coming upon us: half the things that we expect to come upon us never come at all. Where is our faith? Where is our confidence in our Saviour's words? We may well take shame to ourselves, when we read these verses, and then look into our hearts. We may be sure that David's words are true: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." (Psalm 37:25.)