

Gospel Gleanings, July 24, 2022

The Lord Cares for His Own

Dear Friends,

Imbedded in my mind for almost sixty-seven years is that Sunday morning in February when, at age 14, I spoke to my home church for the first time. I read these verses and commented briefly. How very prophetic! I tend to be a worrier. I needed those words then. Many times since then, Sandra has occasionally nudged me, "Joe, don't you think it is time for you to preach that 'Consider the lilies' sermon to yourself?" And every time she reminded me was timely and needed. Perhaps I've made some progress, but I still need this reminder rather often.

Why should we worry? For 81 years, the Lord has always faithfully blessed me far beyond what I deserved, protected me from many painful troubles, most often from myself, and richly punctuated my life with good friends who loved me and encouraged me through those difficult seasons. Will He suddenly now abandon me? Cease those blessings? Scripture loudly reminds me that He shall remain as faithful as He assured me He would be that first Sunday morning I spoke from these verses and tried to voice my youthful faith in His goodness and His kind provision. During Jesus' personal ministry, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. Me thinks I am not unlike many contemporary Christians of the day. We need to go to our knees and pray, "Lord teach me to trust You. Teach me not to worry, to consider birds and lilies."

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

The Lord Cares for His own

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? (Matthew 6:25-30 KJV)

This lesson follows Jesus' warning to the disciples (And to us if we hope to claim that noble title) against self-focused living all for self, including the vain attempt to serve the Lord **and** our self-centered ideas or philosophies. Given the human inclination to self-first thinking, this lesson teaches a timeless truth that we always need.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? When Jesus said, "Take no thought for your life," He did not intend a near mindless "Live in the moment" impulsive lifestyle. "Take no thought" was translated from a Greek word that means...

1. "...to be anxious." (Vine)
2. To be overwhelmed with "...distracting care."

3. "...to have an anxious concern, based on apprehension about possible danger or misfortune — 'to be worried about, to be anxious about.'" (Louw-Nida)

Scripture teaches believers to wisely think "Long-term" thoughts and plans, but always to include in those plans the guiding influence of the Lord, "***If the Lord will, we shall...***" (James 4:15 and context) Often professing Christians give little serious regard for the long-term issues that might influence them either for good or for bad, and they often pay a high price in lost peace and contented joy in the Lord for their neglect. In this lesson, Jesus did not teach us to live impulsively in the moment, but to avoid anxious worry by trusting Him with things unknown or things over which we have little or no control. Oh, how we need this lesson in our day.

Ponder Jesus' words and reasoning. First, avoid weighing your mind down with trivia, such as what clothes you will wear today. Thank the Lord that you have a choice! And put on something appropriate to your day. Don't fret about your next meal. Do you have enough groceries in your kitchen that you can choose "A" or "B"? Thank the Lord for His good provisions and eat something nutritious and healthy. Invest your life and your faith in the more important issues of life. Wild birds don't plant fields and grow them for food. Yet God feeds them. Underscore Jesus' next words, "***Are ye not much better than they?***" As a child of God, even a prodigal child, does the Lord care no more for you than He cares for birds? Really! He had a purpose for you from before He created the universe. Jesus died for you, so that you would be securely prepared by His loving grace for a life of glorious joy with Him for eternity! He made no such provision for birds! His provision for you also includes rich grace supplies and opportunities abounding for gracious fellowship with Him and with His people. If we follow His caring direction, we should never be lonely. We have Him and many of His children with whom to grow good fellowship.

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? Jesus uses that same word which He used in "***Take no thought.***" Ask yourself the question. By your anxious, distracting worry over possible danger or misfortune, can you grow your physical body taller by 18 inches? A "cubit" is the measure from your elbow to the tip of your longest finger. At my physical prime, I stood 5' 9 1/2". Today I'm barely 5' 6". Life and anxious care wore me down 3 1/2". If I could have worried myself 18 inches taller in my youth, I might have gained a basketball scholarship to help me through college instead of having to drop out for lack of funds till much later in life. Jesus obviously challenges us to give logical thought to the emptiness of our anxious worry. Think about the single thing that has caused you the most worry in your whole life. You've lost sleep, walked in a daze through many days because of your distracting worry about the possible danger this thing posed to you or to those you love. How much did all that worry change the outcome? Did it make that thing go away or otherwise neutralize it? If we gave logical thought, instead of emotional thought, to those issues in our lives, we would all discover so much more peace and joy, a blessed state of mind that we have robbed ourselves of enjoying because we allowed that distracting fear and worry to define and control our lives. I offer these words as something of a personal confession. I tend to worry about the things—and especially the people—that mean so much to me. In reflection, all those nights with little sleep, all those distracted days, didn't accomplish anything in terms of eliminating or neutralizing the things that fed my worries. It was truly prophetic that the very first time I spoke in church was from this lesson. I needed the lesson then, and I still need it today. I've made a little progress in not investing empty emotional energy on things I can't control or change, but I still need Jesus' words to nudge me every day.

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Jesus moves us from birds to wild lilies. But His lesson is the

same. However, He makes a surprising point. For first century Jews, Solomon was an Old Testament hero of the greatest magnitude. But Jesus reminds lowly us; even Solomon in his brightest season and clothed in his most regal wardrobe (“arrayed” refers to his wardrobe, the clothes he wore) could not give God such pure praise that that lily in the pond gives to Him! Do you think Jesus spoke these words to wholly capture our attention? Yes indeed.

...*shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?* We can hardly imagine the splendor of Solomon “in all his glory.” To our finite minds, there is hardly a comparison between Solomon in his glory to a lily in the field. Jesus teaches us one of the New Testament’s most assuring lessons in these words. Imagine Solomon in his most magnificent day, look at the beautiful lily in nature. Did God bless Solomon with more, far more, than he deserved? Remember his early prayer for wisdom. He didn’t ask for wealth or the glory that his kingdom realized. The Lord blessed Solomon above measure because he didn’t ask for riches or power for himself, but for humble grace to know how to lead the Lord’s people. The Lord granted that wisdom, but He also gave Solomon far more. The lily doesn’t work sunup to sundown. It sits on its stem, soaks in God’s warm sunshine, and God blesses it to be a delight to our eyes and to His glory.

However, both birds and lilies serve to set the stage for God’s “Main event.” More than the lily in the field, and even more than Solomon in all his glory, Jesus assures us that he shall take care of you and me far more richly than He blessed Solomon or the lilies.

It is no accident that Jesus taught this lesson immediately following His warning to us regarding our sinful ambition to serve something, anything, in addition to the Lord. Given the Lord’s incredible provision for us, why would we have any desire whatever to add a detracting black cloud to our fellowship with Him? His care for you and me is not similar to or even equal to His care of Solomon and lilies. He reminds us that He shall clothe us “*much more*” than either!

I can hear the chorus of sincere, but misguided believers protest, “But you don’t know me. I’m so weak in faith, so sinful. I don’t deserve such blessings. I have no right to expect them because of my failures.” Where in Jesus’ teaching in this lesson did He speak a single word about such blessings only to deserving disciples?

We evaluate ourselves against God’s absolute moral ethics and conclude that we simply deserve nothing whatever, so we train our minds to expect nothing from the Lord. If we follow this path, we fail to grasp one of the most basic truths of this lesson, and so many more. The Lord doesn’t regard you as a repeat offender facing criminal trial. ***You are His child! He is your Father.*** So, you sin. Do you think He didn’t know about your sin when He spoke these words? He judged our sins in Jesus at Calvary. Now He only sees us as His children in His beloved family. When you sin, He doesn’t arrest you and call you to account for your sins in His “Criminal court.” He nudges your conscience. He reminds you of His love, and of your being a member of His own chosen family, beloved and securely kept in His loving grace. If we fail to learn from our sins, ***we may fully expect His chastening judgment, not His criminal execution.*** As our Father, He doesn’t ask for repayment of our sins. He already took care of that debt in Jesus’ sufferings and death. He expects, and commands us to repent and strive harder for closer fellowship with Him and with His children.

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead. (2 Corinthians 5:14 KJV)

What constrains our conduct and nudges us to faithful service? Not a word about fear, and also not a word about how much we hope to gain for ourselves. No striving for stars in our crown, the glorious constraining, governing influence that drives us to more godliness is “***the love of Christ.***” Ideas that appear in definitions of the Greek word translated “constraineth” include holding together, arresting

or holding prisoner (A glorious prison of realized love!) or even to exert strong psychological pressure. But what is the “Arresting officer” in this scenario? It is not a cold and heartless “Officer” of legal power and motive. Rather it is the love of Christ. When enticement to sin pounds in your mind and sings her siren song in your ears, think about Jesus and Calvary. Why did He go to Calvary? Because you—yes, you—are His child and He reminds you of His boundless love for you. He nudges you, even in that moment, to think about Solomon and lilies, but, above all, to think about all you have because of Him, a far more compelling “Constraint” against sin than fear of punishment. Listen to His love in your heart. Think about His love when temptation or bitterness—and especially worry—trouble you. And remember Jesus’ words, “..*how much more!*”

Elder Joe Holder