

Consider the Lilies

*“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.”*
—Luke 12:27

PRIOR TO JESUS’ GIVING

the lesson concerning the lilies, one from the multitudes approached him and asked, “Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus replied, “Who made me a judge or a divider over you?

... Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” (Luke 12:13-15) Here was a new thought for the Lord’s followers. Selfishness has become the mainspring of human activity ever since the disobedience of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Down through history, success in life has oftentimes been measured by the amount of wealth one possesses. Jesus, however, here indicates that this ought not to be the case.

The first lesson Jesus gave in the form of a parable. “The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to

bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” (vss. 16-21) The lesson of this parable is the folly of a life of selfishness and the utmost importance of becoming rich in God’s estimation.

Jesus later explained, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (vs. 34) Our “treasure” is anything which we highly value above all other things in life and, hence, it is that which we love the most. Our treasure is what inspires our heart and mind, and which acts as the incentive in how we use our time, energy and means.

Most people have some type of “treasure.” However, most often it results in only fleeting satisfaction because the treasure chosen is transitory and ultimately disappointing. Many choose as their treasure that which is based upon various earthly things, such as wealth, fame, friends, family, power, influence, popularity or admiration. However, such treasures are subject to change and decay. If one’s heart is centered upon any of them, they are liable in a moment to be swept away, leaving one desolate and despairing because their highest hopes had been centered upon such passing treasures.

Wealth and belongings, laboriously gathered and managed with great care, may vanish overnight. Popularity with others, dearly sought after through

much time and effort, may change and be replaced by reproach, causing one's name to be misrepresented, and sometimes leading to one being ostracized. Houses, obtained and maintained at great cost of time and wealth, may eventually disappear for various reasons. Friends, long trusted, may suddenly turn their back, or even become enemies. Even family members, though dearly loved, eventually pass away, leaving a gaping hole in one's heart.

If, on the other hand, our "treasure" is that which is "rich toward God," then his love and the divinely appointed promises given in the Scriptures become a sweet ointment in all our struggles in life, and they provide us much needed comfort and rest.

Jesus explained to his followers what their proper attitude must be if they were to lay up treasure in heaven. He said, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on." In the original Greek, the expression "take no thought" means "be not anxious." Thus, Jesus is not encouraging his followers to be careless or lazy, but rather that they should not be anxious in the sense of fretting about food or clothing.—Luke 12:22

"CONSIDER"

In conjunction with his parable, Jesus gave the following lesson: "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows ... 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?"—Luke 12:6,7,24

Jesus continued, as stated in our opening text, telling us to consider—reflect upon, think, study and ponder—how the lilies grow, with such seemingly little effort and toil. Even King Solomon “in all his glory,” he says, was not as beautifully arrayed as the simple lily.

An important lesson regarding the lilies is “how they grow.” Jesus described this using the expression, “they toil not,” which in the original Greek means to “not feel fatigue or grow weary.” An important antidote against weariness reads as follows: “Therefore, having so vast a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, and throwing off everything that hinders us and especially the sin that so easily entangles us, let us keep running with endurance the race set before us.” (Heb. 12:1, *International Standard Version*) The lives and godly characters of the many faithful ones of the past and present, comprise a “vast cloud of witnesses,” and the experiences they have faithfully undergone provide wonderful examples to inspire us to greater devotion to God.

Most importantly, we are then admonished to consider Jesus. “Fixing our attention on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith, who, in view of the joy set before him, endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Think about the one who endured such hostility from sinners, so that you may not become tired and give up.” (Heb. 12:2,3, *ISV*) Elsewhere, the Apostle Paul admonishes us to “not be weary in well doing,” because “in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”—Gal. 6:9; II Thess. 3:13

The lily, Jesus said, is a flower so beautiful that it surpasses the glory of Solomon. Yet, it is not the

plant itself which has created its own glory. Rather, its glory is the result of the delicate design of the Creator, and the loving care he exhibits in his created work. The lily simply grows, without question or argument, according to its divinely appointed fashion. Jesus asks us to “consider” these things, saying in essence, that God’s provisions for the sparrows, ravens and lilies are reasons why we should have faith that he will care for us, as long as we are faithfully engaged in doing his will.

A MISCONSTRUED LESSON

The instruction Jesus gave to “consider the lilies” has been misconstrued by some to mean the direct opposite of the lesson which the Master was teaching. The portion of the verse which says, “They toil not, they spin not,” is misapplied by some to erroneously show that Christian growth in the fruits and graces of the spirit can be accomplished by a life of inactivity, and without any real effort on the part of the individual. On the contrary!

Rather, the lesson set forth by Jesus is the necessity for each Christian to not only develop faith in God’s promised care over them, but to also be actively engaged in carrying out the terms of their consecration, and by devoting their lives to him each day. These continually present their “bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” They realize that it is a “reasonable service” and are striving to “be not conformed” to this present evil world, but instead engage all their effort to being “transformed by the renewing” of their mind.—Rom. 12:1,2

Continuing our lesson, Jesus said, “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?” (Luke 12:28) The development of strong faith is a most important attainment to be reached. How true it is with all of us, at one time or another, that a lack of faith holds us back from enjoying the rich spiritual blessings of the Lord that might otherwise be ours.

SEEKING THE KINGDOM

Jesus further admonished, saying, “Seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink. ... For all these things do the nations of the world seek after.” He then assured his disciples, stating, “Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Luke 12:29-31) The word “seek,” used three times in the above verses, is translated from various forms of the Greek word *zeteo*, which means to “worship, demand, or crave.”—*Thayer’s Greek Definitions*

Evidently, Jesus knew that most in the “nations of the world” would rather seek after—worship and demand—temporal things than spiritual blessings. He also saw that a lack of faith would cause a majority of his professed followers to hide behind various excuses for not properly considering God’s care for the lilies and its practical application to the Christian’s life.

A “LITTLE FLOCK”

Jesus realized that there would only be a few, a “little flock,” who would completely trust in the Heavenly Father’s promises and totally devote themselves to serving God. To these he says, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

The test of faith, which Jesus is emphasizing in our lesson, is whether or not we are willing to depart from the attitude of the world of making earthly treasures our main priority in life, and instead set as our life's highest aim being "rich toward God."

How do we become spiritually rich? The Apostle Peter provides this answer: "The tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (I Pet. 1:7, *English Standard Version*) Literal gold is refined using fire to remove impurities. Similarly, God permits various experiences and trials to come upon us, to allow us to develop and crystalize our character.

Peter continues his admonition, saying, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."—I Pet. 4:12,13, *ESV*

TO "FEAR NOT" REQUIRES FAITH

Jesus states why we should "fear not," because "it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." However, this is on the condition that we first "seek ... the kingdom of God" by sacrificing our all in his service.

To "fear not" requires deeply rooted faith. As we consider the lilies, this important lesson is given to us in two ways. First, it is important to develop faith and trust in the Heavenly Father's willingness and ability to care for our needs, provided we are faithfully

devoting the choicest of all that we have and are in his service. Secondly, a more severe test of our faith comes when we may, at times, be placed in a position where we specially need God's provision for our temporal necessities. In such experiences, do we have the faith which tells us, "fear not?"

SERIOUS QUESTIONS

Jesus knew that human selfishness would argue for a course in life that assures the Christian a supposed condition of "economic security." Those chasing after the illusive bubble of present advantage or various earthly treasures, would be tempted to take their sacrifice off the altar and, as it were, return to the fishing business, instead of remembering that they had been called to be "fishers of men."—Matt. 4:19

A solemn consideration for every Christian is that the kingdom of heaven cannot be obtained in any other way except by giving up all that we have and devoting our life in this one great divine cause. Paul echoed these same sentiments when he said, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, ... I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Paul sacrificed everything in the divine service, and thus is a noble example to us.—Phil. 3:8-14

SPIRITUAL BALANCE NECESSARY

It is true that every Christian must make needful provision for themselves, and for those dependent upon them according to the flesh. Indeed, the carrying out of this duty is one of the demands upon our consecrated lives, accepted by the Heavenly Father as service rendered unto him. (I Tim. 5:8; II Thess. 3:8-10) It is also true that we need to plan in some

fashion for the future in connection with nearly everything we do.

Even along spiritual lines, it is important that we make plans for future activities in an orderly manner. For example, if we desire to hold a meeting in a particular location on a certain day, we must save funds in advance, and then go to that location to contact the proper persons there in order to make arrangements for that activity. In short, the consecrated Christian life is one so fully devoted to God that whatever time or effort given to material things should not be with the thought of enriching ourselves, but to discharge our proper responsibilities toward others.

Jesus makes it clear that if we are faithful in sacrificing every earthly treasure, as he did, and follow in his footsteps, the Heavenly Father, knowing what temporal things we have need of, will overrule in making provision for us along those lines without the necessity of our giving anxious thought concerning them.

HOW GOD CARES FOR US

As we “consider the lilies,” and how God cares for us, it is first important that we not dictate to him what our “supposed” needs may be. The promise is not that he will supply what we think we may need, but what we actually need according to his perfect judgment. (Phil. 4:19) If our estimate of what we need is based upon a desire to retain earthly treasures, then we will be constantly holding back our full devotion to him. If, though, as Paul did, we count all earthly treasures as “loss” [Greek: a detriment] in order that we might “win Christ,” then we will be content with whatever God’s providence may decree

as being best for our spiritual and eternal interests.
—Phil. 3:7,8

It is a great advantage to always remember the sacrificial viewpoint of the Christian life, and to properly appreciate the manner in which the Heavenly Father cares for us. We have covenanted to lay down our lives, therefore we should not lose faith in God's care. (Matt. 10:39; 16:25) If God permits us to suffer hardships which are designed to assist in the consummation of our sacrifice, we can rest assured that he will not permit us to be tried beyond what we can endure. Paul states: "God is faithful," and "will not permit you to be tried beyond your ability; but with the trial, will also direct the issue, that you may be able to bear it.—I Cor. 10:13, *The Emphatic Diaglott*

God does not shield the Christian from physical suffering. Even the faithful Apostle Paul, who in obedience to the terms of discipleship had sacrificed everything in the ministry of the Gospel, and who, therefore, had a right to claim the Master's promise of divine care, knew what it was to suffer want. Concerning this Paul says, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."—Phil. 4:12,13

If we are faithful to our consecration vows, we too will joyfully accept whatever situation God sees is best for us, as Paul did. The test of our faith in following in the Master's footsteps is indeed a severe one. If our faith is sufficiently developed, however, we can rest in the full assurance that whatever the Lord may permit to come upon us in the way of joy or sorrow, will (*Continued on page 36*)

(Continued from page 31) be for our highest spiritual welfare and growth.

God provides for the lily and thus it grows, but at times it is also subjected to winds, storms, heat and cold. By means of these experiences it grows stronger and fulfils its function of helping beautify the earth. Similarly, God cares for us, not by shielding us from the hardships of life, but by allowing the storms and the winds of trial to strengthen us. Through these experiences the New Creature is being prepared to perform its future function as a joint-heir with Jesus in the blessing of all mankind.—Rom. 8:17,18

God is dealing with the fully consecrated as New Creatures, and “though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” (II Cor. 4:16) Paul further admonishes us to consider our present trials as but a “light affliction,” permitted only for a “moment,” compared to eternity. All our experiences and trials are overruled by our loving Heavenly Father to work out in us “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” The apostle concludes his admonition, stating, “We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”—vss. 17,18

GOD’S PROVIDENCES

God’s providences may vary. Therefore, it is not for us to decide when shall come remarkable deliverances and when we shall be permitted to continue in a difficult experience for a time. For example, while the Lord intervened to deliver the three

Hebrews from the fiery furnace, he did not intervene to prevent the beheading of John the Baptist, even though regarding John it is specifically declared, “There has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.”—Matt. 11:11, *ESV*

Similarly, although Peter was delivered from prison by the angel of the Lord, James was not, and instead was permitted to be killed with the sword. (Acts 12:1-11) We remember also that Paul’s life was miraculously preserved on several occasions, while on other occasions dire disaster came upon the Lord’s faithful ones, such as in the case of Stephen who was stoned.

It is not for us to determine what should be God’s providence in respect to ourselves. We are to simply apply divine principles in our life, regardless of the consequences, and “trust in the LORD.” (Ps. 125:1; Prov. 3:5; Isa. 26:4) This attitude was beautifully expressed by the three Hebrews, who declared to King Nebuchadnezzar that God was entirely capable of delivering them from the king’s power, but that, whether God chose to do so or not, they would remain faithful to him and would not violate divine principles. (Dan. 3:1-18) It is such a character that our Heavenly Father is seeking to develop in us.

Let us continually “consider the lilies how they grow.” May our consecration be so complete that we will gladly permit our Heavenly Father to decide what we need. Let us also rejoice in the abundant manner in which he cares for us, being fully assured that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”—Rom. 8:28 ■