

“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold fast to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. 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? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek;) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”—Matt. 6:24-34.

FREEDOM FROM CARE
A Sermon by Theodor Zahn

AMONGST the commandments of Jesus there are some which sound as though we were invited by some one to climb a high and steep mountain with him. Most people are content to view the steep heights from below, and to marvel at bolder mountaineers. They remain below themselves, and say: No ordinary Christian man can ascend such heights, and we are neither saints nor heroes. There are other commands of the Lord which sound so simple and moderate, so easy and self-evident, that we might almost imagine it unnecessary to add a single word of explanation or encouragement; every one of any sense or any piety must say “Yea” and “Amen” to them, and act accordingly. My friends, to which of these two classes of Christ’s commands would you reckon the words of our text for to-day to belong? Are the commands we have just heard difficult or easy? that we must serve God only and not mammon, that we are not to be anxious, that we are to seek the kingdom of God, and leave all else to God? The Lord has proved the truth of these His requirements clearly and convincingly enough. Every child must say He is right. It is impossible to serve God and mammon at the same time, it really cannot be done; it is also very foolish to be anxious; it is easy to believe that God cares for us in all things. And yet, my beloved, what mature Christian can say: “To me it is a matter of course; I have not only learnt this from my youth, but I have also done it, so that to live free from care on earth as a child of the Father in Heaven, and, like a bird in the branches, to sing joyfully of the goodness of God, who has given me all, has become my second nature.” The commands of the Lord Jesus are not all hard for those who believe in Him and love Him, and they are not intended to be a hard yoke or a heavy burden to any one; but yet for those who grasp them in their innermost sense, and desire to fulfil them truly, they are so deep and so high, that the greatest here below cannot say: “I am equal to them.” But they are only incomprehensible and unacceptable to those who do not really wish to be religious.

There are baptized heathen, who have not yet resolved to serve one Lord at all times. They cannot, indeed, entirely evade the laws of the State, if they wish to escape serious difficulties. Nor can they break through the still stronger laws of nature. They cannot undo what has come to pass; they cannot prevent what is going to happen; they cannot escape their fate. And yet, in their innermost hearts, they imagine that they are their own masters; and that from this firm citadel, by their independent actions, they may assert their own wills in spite of the laws of the world. If they are rich, they fancy they possess means whereby they may escape from the servitude of care and dependence on other men. And all the time they do not see that they are the servants of the very mammon that they look upon as

their obedient servant. In order to preserve and increase it, they must do much that is unpleasant to them, and they must be as full of care as the poorest man, who lives from hand to mouth. When, however, mammon fails them, then they see that they have been serving an idol that cannot help its slaves when they most need its help. And this is only one of the many idols which are served by those who do not want to make the only true God the Lord of their lives. There is honour that man craves, and fashion from which he dare not withdraw himself. There are sensual pleasures whose destructiveness is better known to man than he cares to acknowledge to himself; there is the bad habit from which a man would so gladly be freed. And when man has served this lord long enough, then comes Death, before whom all tremble as worthless servants, even before he arrives, and in whose presence, when he comes, all man's imaginary self-glorification actually crumbles away. Jesus has not, indeed, much to say to those who imagine they are their own masters, and least of all that which He says to us to-day. He says it to His disciples, He preaches it to His community. Only they who acknowledge God as their Lord, and who desire to live in the kingdom of God, which He has founded on earth by Jesus Christ, and under Him as their King for time and for eternity, only they can understand the Gospel for to-day and live in conformity with it. But to us also, who wish to be Christians, whether we be young in years and children in understanding, or have grown grey in the practice of Christian godliness, to us all it is said by the Lord whose name has been named over us: "*If ye wish to be blessed in time and eternity, ye must give up care.*"

It is thus that I think I can gather up in one the actual contents of the text. I shall endeavour to unfold its riches, by saying—

First: *A Christian must not be anxious.*

Secondly: *A Christian cannot be anxious.*

Thirdly: *A Christian will not be anxious.*

I.

A Christian must not be anxious. We learn this directly from our text: "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." Be not anxious, saying the things which those who are full of care are in the habit of saying. "Be not anxious for the morrow." This command has been often explained to us from our youth, and has been impressed upon us, as hardly any other, in the beautiful old hymns of our Church, so that any misunderstanding is scarcely possible. It is true that our German word (*Sorge*) is ambiguous; it means something which is very good and necessary, but also something which is very wrong and foolish. The man who works at his calling that he and his may not starve or beg; the mother who tends and educates her children, in order that they may become skilful in body and mind, so that some day they may be able to support themselves in the world; the farmer, who thinks in winter of the summer, and in spring of autumn; the youth, who during his life as a student thinks of the time which is coming, when he will have to provide for himself and others with the interest of the mental capital he is now beginning to gather together; the statesman, who fixes his eye on every germ of future danger for his Fatherland, and averts the misfortune which might possibly first threaten his grandchildren: these, in a certain sense, are all caring for the morrow, and are right in doing so. Such consideration for the future, and such active provision for the future, are only the opposite of thoughtless levity, and the fulfilment of duty; and if such work is sanctified by prayer, God's good pleasure and blessing rest upon it.

But there is also quite another kind of anxiety. The Greek language, in which the Apostles and Evangelists wrote, has a peculiar word for it, and it is used here. It denotes the division, the partition

of the heart, the distraction of the mind hither and thither, by all sorts of alarming questions and doubts about the uncertain future. This is the anxiety which saddens the heart, and makes the face gloomy, lames the power of action, deadens the spirit of prayer within us, and makes us displeasing to God and man. It incites us to be always asking either ourselves or others: "What shall we eat? what shall we drink? wherewithal shall we be clothed?" The meaning of these questions always is: "We certainly shall not have what we need, things will go badly with us; I do not know how it will turn out, therefore no one ought to expect me to be joyful to-day."

If our anxiety were only confined to the things referred to by the Lord! But how many cares even they have whose daily bread is richly provided in advance, and for whom the question is really very remote, wherewith they should provide for themselves and their families. The same anxiety can find vent in other questions. One asks himself: "How shall I bear it if my illness grows worse? How much longer can I bear to see one of my family becoming hopelessly ill?" Another asks: "What am I to say if I have to speak in public? What am I to write if I must write? How am I to defend myself if I am attacked?" From the child who is afraid his school-exercises will not be ready, to the old man who feels the diminution of his strength and dreads every change, we are all daily in temptation of giving way to tormenting care. It seems more natural to the heart of man in this changing life to be anxious than to hope. But there is One who cries to us in this changing life, and whose words will not pass away: Be not anxious! ye, who have any trust in My Word, must not be anxious, for it is foolish and useless, yea, it is more, it is sinful and godless.

We learn by experience that anxiety is foolish and useless. Even a fool does not imagine that by taking thought he can make one grey hair black, or avert any serious danger. That would be a glimmer of hope, and not mere anxiety. On the contrary, every one who is anxious must acknowledge that by his anxiety he only causes himself trouble which would not otherwise exist, that he only increases the weight laid upon his life by the mighty hand of God, that he spoils his joy in the goodness of God and His gifts, and shortens the length and strength of his life. When a difficulty has been overcome which has caused us much anxiety, we are ready to smile at our unnecessary cares; and every sensible man ought thus to judge in advance of all his anxieties, even if blind chance and heartless fate did rule the world and the life of each individual. How ought we then to judge of our anxieties, if we are ready to confess the first Article of the Christian Faith without any hesitation; we to whom Jesus speaks as the children of the Heavenly Father?

It is indeed godless and heathenish to be anxious; it means denying the God, in heart and deed, whom we confess with our lips; it means behaving as though He did not exist, as though He were not our Father. And yet He is our Father, because He created us together with all His creatures, because He has given us our life and still preserves it. We cannot excuse our foolish anxiety by our shortsightedness, which prevents us from surveying the connection of things, and by our powerlessness to bring evil things to a good issue. We are certainly shortsighted and powerless; but one thing we know, though we cannot see it, and it can make us strong against everything that may threaten to oppose us in the world. We know the living God, before whose eyes the complicated and intricate mechanism of the world lies open and transparent, and in whose strong hand the threads of this mechanism are gathered together, and in whose heart the eternal Wisdom dwells which is well pleased with man. And we know something still greater about this living God, and we know it much more directly. He Himself has opened our eyes through His Son to see something of the grace of God, by which He forgives us our sins, that we may believe and know that He is our Father, who employs all His might and wisdom in the service of His loving will, in His thoughts for us, as our Saviour. If we have ever experienced anything of the grace of God, which through Christ has condescended to us, that we might be raised to eternal life, we must have been conscious of the power of God, which helps us on through all the changes of this earthly life to the eternal goal. And if our consciences tell us that we are bound to trust and not to mistrust the grace of God, whereby our sins are forgiven, then we shall be

conscience-stricken by the command: "Be not anxious." It is one and the same mouth in which there is no deceit, which says to thee: "Thy sins are forgiven thee," and "Be not anxious for the morrow." As often as we hear this old command repeated, we must also, conscious of our daily transgressions, humble ourselves before the Lord Jesus, who has given us this kind, loving, and easy command. And when, in His Name, we pray the Lord's Prayer, and go on from the petition for daily bread to the petition "Forgive us our trespasses," then let us also remember our sin, in that we have neither obeyed the Son nor trusted the Father but have been anxious like the heathen. *A Christian must not be anxious.*

II.

Again, a Christian *cannot be anxious*. It sounds as though we contradicted ourselves, when we say a Christian cannot do what we are all doing so constantly. But our Lord and Master, who knows us better than we know ourselves, says to us: "Ye cannot serve two masters; ye cannot serve God and mammon at the same time." Jesus had spoken before of the covetousness which lays up treasures on earth; and this sentence applies first to those men who give way to avarice, and who yet want to be religious; it cannot be; the two services do not agree. But the same sentence applies also to Christians who give way to anxiety, and the Lord Himself has thus applied it. After saying to His disciples, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," He continued, "Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious." That anxious questioning of care, "What shall we eat, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" is the service of mammon; for it bears witness to an honouring, even an idolising of earthly goods, which cannot be reconciled with the honour and the service of the true God. It is the service of idols.

Let us only ask our own experience to what blessings our thoughts are chiefly directed. A Christian's first and last thought should be that he may receive the grace of God, that his sins may be forgiven, and may remain forgiven, that he may not consent to sin, that he may grow in holiness, that he may always do what is right, and that he may hold fast his faith to the end, and so be saved. But let us be honest: are these really the things about which we are generally anxious, when we look forward gloomily, and go sadly on our way? Many a Christian might well think with fear and trembling of the mental development and the spiritual welfare of his children. But is that really the anxiety which most oppresses the hearts of Christian parents? The man who takes a wider view, and follows public life in Church and School, in State and Nation, with some degree of interest, may well often feel alarmed when he looks at the present and forecasts the future. May God forgive him if he sometimes asks in doubt: "How can saving truth triumphantly uphold itself against all the deceitful wisdom of our days? How can our holy faith be preserved for our descendants? When will the children of light cease being so inferior to the children of the world in common sense and energy? How is the Gospel to reach all the men who need it? How is the prophecy to be fulfilled that Jesus Christ will manifest Himself as the Lord and King of all spirits and of all flesh?" There are many honest Christians who now and then ask such questions with troubled hearts; but they do not boast that such high and holy thoughts stir their minds: they are more ready to rebuke themselves for faint-heartedness.

But are these really the anxieties which constantly rob our minds of their cheerfulness, double the vexations of our daily work, and cloud our joy in the gifts and goodness of God? I imagine our daily anxieties circle much more often round our own worthy persons and our earthly well-being. If it is not dry bread, it is perhaps the comfortable life to which we are accustomed, our own advancement, or the happy settlement of our children in life. Such things cause more anxiety even to people who are religiously minded, than their salvation and their sanctification, than the eternal welfare of their children and the kingdom of Christ. By our anxiety we betray how much we value these blessings. By our anxiety we make ourselves of less account than the transitory blessings which God gives to and takes from men as He wills, in order that they may use them freely, as the sons and daughters of the

great Head of all things. Instead of this, we bend the knee in our anxiety to the same idol as the miser and the thief. The godless man can do this because he has no other Lord and God. The Christian really cannot do it, for he is the child and servant of God; and a man cannot serve two masters at once, and least of all two such masters, who are so very different, and who yet both lay claim to the whole man. The delusion into which we fall, when we allow anxiety to find a place in our hearts, without giving notice that we intend to leave the service of the Lord God, is, that we do not perceive how we become the servants of all that is earthly, uncertain, and transitory, when anxiously and doubtfully we make the happiness of our lives to depend upon it. The service of God depends upon faith and perfects itself in faith; anxiety is unbelief and faint-heartedness. Where faith is, there the future seems even brighter than the present; where faint-hearted care enters, there all becomes dark. I know as well as any of you, that here below there is not one who is perfect in faith; for then he would be perfect in all things like Jesus, the Beginning and End of faith. I am speaking against that deferential tone which so many Christians use when speaking of their anxieties; it is a delusion into which they are betrayed by the respectable appearance of anxiety, as though anxiety were more in keeping with a Christian life than levity and love of the world. Our Lord teaches us to judge differently of the care which weighs down the life of many a Christian, laming his work, and deadening his prayers. He pronounces it a heathenish sin and an idol worship, which is simply incompatible with a Christian life. Let us not beat about the bush, but acknowledge it to be what it is, a poison that slowly saps our life. We ought always to give it its right name, and to fight against it to the death.

We must not be anxious, according to the gracious will of our God; *we cannot* be anxious as long as we think and live as Christians, therefore we *will* not be anxious.

III.

How kindly our Lord endeavours to encourage us in making this resolution! He does not confine Himself to showing us how foolish and sinful anxiety is, how incompatible with the best treasure of our lives. He shows us also how glad and happy in itself, how beautiful and pleasing to God and man, is the life of a child of God who is not anxious. He calls upon us to recognise the types and pictures of this life of the children of God on earth, in the life of nature around us, that we may realise how natural it ought to be to men to feel no anxiety, but only to trust. Behold the birds of heaven, they sow not, neither do they reap, but neither are they anxious or troubled, for, fed by God, they sing their songs and rejoice in their life. Behold the flowers of the field, they grow and bloom without any trouble or compulsion, and rejoice our eyes and hearts with the pure beauty and the brilliancy of colour with which they are clothed by the great Gardener of the world. That the birds and flowers know nothing of hard work and bitter care, is connected, it is true, with the fact that they stand far below us, and that they have no part in the higher gifts and tasks which have been given to us men. But ought we therefore to be unable to learn anything from them? To-day the Lord Jesus places before our eyes only one of the many lessons which we ought to learn from the government of God in nature. We ought to encourage ourselves in the God who shows His goodness and His wisdom, His joy in life and in the forms of life far beyond the boundaries of rational beings, by bestowing life and well-being, form and beauty in lavish abundance on other orders of being, always creating them anew, and even allowing them to spring up anew out of the death of the creature. He is a Lord of inexhaustible riches; He is a Lord who is absolutely good, who blesses willingly where His gifts are most misinterpreted and misused, as man misinterprets them and misuses them, by turning away from the source of his life. And this God is our Father. We have been from the beginning very different in His eyes from the birds and flowers; and in spite of our sin we are still something very different in the sight of God from the unreasoning creatures which know nothing of sin, but also nothing of their God. He has called us again to Himself, in His Son, from all self-chosen ways of error, and He has called us into a kingdom wherein we are to live eternally under Him as His children, knowing and fulfilling the thoughts of God,

and enjoying God Himself in all His gifts.

It is true that this kingdom, which we Christians must go on seeking till it has fully appeared, is not of this world. It does not consist of eating and drinking, of dress and the beauty of life, nor of any one of the blessings of life, about which in our faint-heartedness we become so anxious. The first and most essential blessing, in this kingdom of God and of Christ, is righteousness, the harmony of our will and innermost being with the will of our God. Whoever does not first of all seek the righteousness which comes from God, and which is acceptable to God, whoever does not hunger and thirst after the righteousness of God, does not seek the kingdom of God to which God has called us. But whoever seeks this kingdom of God, whoever has accepted as his own will the will of God that we should be righteous and be saved, has also thereby banished earthly care from his life. For the kingdom of righteousness and grace is really established on earth, it is implanted in this world, where flowers bloom and birds sing, and men work in the sweat of their brows, and feel pain and pleasure. We who are to be the citizens of an eternal kingdom are not spirits which hover about in the air, but we experience in our own persons the grace of God who wills to make us righteous and His children. In this bodily life He bids us, while working and praying, to do His will, and to seek His kingdom. This would be impossible, if He were not one and the same God and Father who clothes the flowers in their passing beauty, and who puts upon sinners the robe of righteousness; who allows the birds to rejoice in their transient existence, and who gives to us eternal life.

Let us thank the Lord that He has not disdained to speak of the birds and flowers, and not only of them as the types and figures of spiritual life, but of the very plants and beasts themselves, as the objects of the providence of God, who nevertheless is not their Father but our Father. He lets us gaze, in them, on the creative goodness and paternal love of God, without which we men, also living in the body on this earth, could not rejoice in the saving grace of our God, and serve Him joyfully during this life as now we can. It is just when we do not forget that we are of infinitely greater value than the birds and flowers, and we therefore seek first and last the righteousness and the kingdom of God, that the sovereignty of our God in the lower realms of nature strengthens our faith. All for which we take thought, and which yet we cannot attain, is given freely and richly to creatures so much more insignificant than we are. Why should these things be denied to us, whom He has created and called, during this earthly life, to seek that which is eternal? If we do this, then all that is needful for us in this life must be ours; it is an addition to the gift of eternity which is a matter of course. Why should we doubt? Why should we be anxious? We would much rather not be anxious. The words of our Lord have been proved to be true by many of His followers who have sought the kingdom of God since the day of the Sermon on the Mount, and many have acknowledged it as their own experience for the strengthening of their weaker brethren. When the Lord sat at meat for the last time with His disciples, and asked them, "When I sent you without purse and scrip and shoes, lacked ye anything?" they answered Him: "Nothing." And if the same Lord were to-day to enter one or other of our homes, where He has been a welcome guest for a long time, and were to ask the master and mistress of the house: "Have ye ever been in want?" do you believe that He would receive an essentially different answer? As far as my experience goes, the majority would give just the same answer as those first hearers of the Sermon on the Mount. But even if one or another had painful remembrances of want and need, still they too would not refuse to confess: "We must bear the blame; for we have often allowed care to reign in our homes and in our hearts instead of the words of Christ." And who can exonerate himself from such perversity? Yet still I trust that we have all of us allowed our Lord to say to us once more to-day: "Ye must not be anxious like the heathen, and ye cannot be anxious and yet be My disciples." Let us all promise Him willingly and joyfully to-day: "We will not be anxious, we will far rather seek the kingdom of God by prayer and in work." Amen.