

SPIRITUAL FRAGRANCE FROM THE FLOWERS

"The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." Isaiah 40:6-8.

Nature is a wonderful source of inspiration to God's children. The blue sky, the beautiful trees, the high mountains, the vast ocean and the singing birds all contribute worthwhile lessons to the child of God. But the flowers breathe forth to him a spiritual fragrance which is ever a delight to his heart and of lasting benefit to his life. Let us thank God for the flowers, which are God's gift to men, and let us seek to breathe into our lives some of their spiritual fragrance.

I. Flowers Are Beautiful.

The first thought that comes to us as we think about what the flowers mean to us is their beauty. Flowers are beautiful. God made them so. We like to have flowers in our yards to beautify them. We decorate our homes, our schools and our churches with them. When Solomon built the Temple, he sought to make it as beautiful as possible, for it was to symbolize God's dwelling place. Therefore, we read that carved flowers formed a part of the decorations on the walls of the building. "And he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, within and without" (I Kings 6:29). But the Apostle John tells us there will not be any Temple in the New Jerusalem. "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (Revelation 21:22). It was necessary for Solomon to beautify his temple with flowers, but in the New Jerusalem the center of attraction shall be God and Christ. Down here we admire the beauty of the flowers, but up there we shall be enraptured with the beauty of the Lord. As the Psalmist said, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple" (Psalm 27:4). If we are faithful in carrying out God's instructions for our lives, then God will indeed be to us a "crown of glory" and a "diadem of beauty." "In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people" (Isaiah 28:5).

Then we learn the lesson that God's people should be as beautiful in their lives as the flowers are in their appearance before men. God alone can enable us to live beautiful lives. In Hosea 14:5 we read, "I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily." What a fine picture of what God expects from us! If we put our complete trust in Christ, then God will be able to say of us, "He shall grow as the lily." Let us seek to beautify the ugly surroundings which may be about us by living lives as pure as the lily and as beautiful as God's flowers.

II. Flowers Are Fragrant.

A second thing which makes the flowers such a blessing to us is their fragrance. Of course, not all flowers are fragrant, but those that are become a double blessing to us. The fragrance of the flowers is beautifully symbolical of the fragrance which comes from Christ and which it is our duty as Christians to pass on to others. "Now thanks

be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish" (II Corinthians 2:14-15). The first thing that this verse teaches us is that all of our spiritual fragrance comes from Christ. Have you ever stood in the midst of such a mass of sweetly perfumed flowers that your very clothes imbibed their fragrance? If you would have your lives all saturated with the sweetness of the Lord, then you must spend much time in the presence of "the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the Valley." The other thought is this: When you have been filled with Christ's fragrance, then it is your duty to diffuse that fragrance to others, both saved and unsaved. It is our privilege to give to the world a sample of the fragrance which comes from the Rose of Sharon, and thus create in men a desire for that fragrance in their own lives.

III. Flowers Are Helpful.

What cheer they bring to those who are sick, and what encouragement to those who are under the cloud of despondency! Flowers seem to speak a message of hope to those who need it. One day the Apostle Paul was shut up in prison in Rome. A little group of church members living in the city of Philippi found out about his predicament, chose one of their number, Epaphroditus, and sent him away to Rome with a lovely gift for Paul. This gift was a source of great joy to Paul, and, so, in writing his thank-you letter back, we find the Apostle referring to the incident in these words, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity" (Philippians 4:10). In using the word "flourish" Paul evidently had in mind the picture of a flower growing forth in the springtime to cheer the passerby. Their love-gift served as a bouquet of flowers to gladden his heart in a peculiarly trying time in his life. Flowers are given as a token of the interest and love of a friend. In this respect, every good deed we do to be a friend to someone in need is like giving a bouquet of flowers. How many such bouquets have you given lately?

IV. Flowers Are Carefree.

One of the most interesting things about flowers is that they are carefree. As a matter of fact, human beings seem to have a monopoly on all the worry in existence. Oh, that we might learn the simple yet sublime lesson which Christ taught in the Sermon on the Mount. From Matthew 6:28-30 we read, "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?" If God provides for the lilies without worry on their part, will He not provide for us? If God makes the lilies beautiful without worry on their part, will He not also make our lives beautiful without constant worry on our part?

"Yes, leave it with Him, the lilies all do, and they grow.

They grow in the rain, and they grow in the dew, yes, they grow--

They grow in the darkness all hid in the night,

They grow in the sunshine revealed by the light,

They grow by the wayside a wonderful sight, still they grow.

"Yes, leave it with Him, you're more dear to His heart, you
well know,
Than the lilies that bloom, or the flowers that start 'neath
the snow.
Whatever you need, if you ask it in prayer,
Just leave it with Him, for you are His care."

V. Flowers Are Short-lived.

No matter how beautiful and fragrant and helpful and carefree the flowers may be, their lives at best are very short. Many times you have had flowers in a vase on a table in the home. You watched the blossoms come out one by one, and also the old blossoms fade and wither away one by one. In a few days all those old blossoms which had been such a source of inspiration to you were faded and gone. The flowers thus give us a picture of the transitoriness of human life. "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more" (Psalm 103:15-16).

Time is short. Are we making the most of it?

"We go this way but once. Ah, never more
Can we go back alone the selfsame way,
To get more out of life, undo the wrongs,
Or speak love's words we knew but did not say."

The flowers also picture the uncertainty of riches. "But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways" (James 1:10-11). Riches are very uncertain. A millionaire may be a pauper the next day. But even if his riches last during his lifetime, time soon passes and the man goes into his grave and leaves all of his possessions behind him for someone else to spend or squander. If God sees fit to give us money, let us use it wisely and not trust in our riches, for God will hold us accountable for the stewardship of our money.

By way of contrast the flowers teach us the permanency of God's Word. "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (I Peter 1:24-25). The flowers we see about us will soon be gone, and we, too, will be gone, but God's Word will stand forever. If God's Word were not eternal, then we would be without any security. In a world where everything changes, how thankful we ought to be that we have a Book divine which changes not.

God's Word contains a reference to everlasting flowers. This reference is a glorious promise to God's faithful servants. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (I Peter 5:2-4). God's servant who is faithful

to the task which God gives him shall receive a crown of everlasting flowers. Such a promise as that ought to influence us to do our very best for the Master. May God help each of us to be faithful servants of His!