

## LEARNING FROM THE LILIES

"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" (Matthew 6: 28-29).

One cannot read the Sermon on the Mount without realizing that Christ Jesus was a master teacher and adept at using the common things of life in the presentation of divine truth. He drew many simple and beautiful illustrations from nature, and it was well that He did, because these things are all about us. As Shakespeare has reminded us, there are sermons in trees and stones and running brooks. More than any other teacher, Christ called attention to the things close at hand and within the reach of common minds which were likely to be neglected.

Christ said, "Consider the lilies of the field." By that statement He meant do not pass by them heedlessly or hurriedly, but stop to observe them and to study them and to learn the lessons which they teach. Everything in nature is a letter to us from the pen of God. The heavens above us are a great scroll written all over by the hand of God, and the earth at our feet is dotted with sweet messages from Him. From the smallest atom to the brightest star, nature has a voice, but, alas, how dull of hearing are our ears! Just as the little bee finds sweetness in a flower, there is a divine sweetness for us in every flower if we but take time to gather it.

On every page of the book of nature there are valuable lessons to be learned, but not everyone knows how to learn them. If we would learn the lessons from nature or the Bible that God wants us to learn, we must study them in a spirit of love and devotion.

When Christ invited His disciples to "Consider the lilies," which were evidently growing wild in the fields, He was about to lead them into some of the most profound truths of the Christian life. He not only wanted them to look at the lilies, but to observe them closely, to think about them, and to learn from them.

As we attempt to obey Christ's command: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow," we shall think of:

### I. Their Loveliness.

Christ, Who above all others has the seeing eye and the understanding heart, was lavish in His praise of the loveliness of the lilies as He stood in their midst on the hillside in Galilee. He said "That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Of course, many today would not agree with the Master. If we had seen Solomon and a lily standing side by side, doubtless most of us would have given all of our attention to Solomon. One reason for this is the simple fact that so many of us are more interested in the counterfeit than we are the genuine. We like tinsel better than we do real gold. We thrill more over glass beads than we do over diamonds. We prefer the glow worm to the star.

What then is the secret of the compelling loveliness of the lilies?

#### 1. It is not in their rank.

Christ did not call attention to the beauty and loveliness of pots in which

the lilies grow. He did not command us to observe what skilled pieces of work the pots were, or how showily they were gilded. The glory of the lilies was not that of rank or position. That is the only glory that some people ever get. Apart from the glory of rank to which they were born they have no glory at all.

2. It is not in their social position.

Our attention is not directed to the lilies because of their aristocratic neighbors. Whether the lilies were in a circle with select flowers or rubbed against a sour dock on one side and a ragweed on the other side, their glory was not that of social position.

3. It is inherent in the lilies.

(1) Naturalness is one of the glories that the lilies possess.

They are utterly free from affectation and cant. They do not put on a lily face in order to hide a dog fennel heart. The lilies are just what they seem to be, no more and no less.

What a fine virtue is genuineness, or open-hearted sincerity! How repellent is counterfeit, hypocrisy, and insincerity! What poor creatures we have become when we try to pose as other than we are, and to impress people as being what we are not. There is something so helpful and genuinely charming about a person whom you know to be transparently sincere and true.

(2) Unspottedness is another glory which the lilies possess.

One cannot stand in the presence of the lilies without being impressed and made heart hungry by their purity. It still remains true that genuine goodness, or thorough unspottedness, is the most winsome virtue that this world knows.

It is said that the mission workers in the East End of London used to carry a white flower. One night when one of these mission workers was talking to an outcast woman, to the surprise of the worker, the woman suddenly began to weep. When the missionary sought to know the reason, the outcast touched the petals of the flower with a faded finger and said, "I am not like that. I used to be like that." Against the white unspottedness of the flower she saw her own soiled life.

The lilies are unspotted. And let us not forget that the same God Who gives unspottedness to the lily can and will give it to you and me. He said, "though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow."

We have in the lilies the very graces that we need most in ourselves.

## II. Their Life.

In Palestine the lilies grew in the sheltered plain, by the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and in close proximity to the far-famed rose of Sharon. Wherever God placed them, whether it a bare or a beautiful spot, the lilies pushed up their modest stalks and expanded their bright petals.

As we look at these lovely lilies, we might say, "You are genuine, unspotted, and winsome. How did you come to be what you are? Were you touched by some wonderful wand and suddenly made into what you are?" Their answer would be, "No, we grew. We arrived where we are today, not all at once but little by little. Another fact that you must remember is that we did not grow independently. Back of our births was God. It was through Him that we began to live, and that we have continued to do so. He is the source of all our beauty. Do you see these garments that we wear? Human hands never wove garments so beautiful as ours, which were woven by His hands. It was in His soil that we were rooted, and it is His sun that has warmed us, and from Him all of our growth has come."

Christ commands us to consider how the lilies grow. How do they grow?

1. By being submissive to God's will.

Simply, quietly, and spontaneously they yielded themselves in glad submission to what God intended them to be. They were content to be what they were and where they were. Are you that wise? Have you learned that it is always best to be submissive to God's will?

2. By appropriating what God provided.

The lilies appropriated the means which God provided for their growth. Turning their faces toward the sun, they drew their beauty therefrom. Opening their chalices, they willingly received each dewdrop and shower that God sent. Rooted in the ground, they took such nourishment as the soil had to yield to them. The lilies simply took what God gave them day by day and night by night. In doing so they received what they needed.

3. By sharing with others.

The bees and the humming birds obtained part of their sweetness, and the winds carried away their perfume. Had the lilies tried to hold the sweetness and the perfume that God had given them, they would have withered. As God's child, have you learned that the fine art of living is that of giving, or sharing with others.

III. Their Lessons.

1. The ministry of beauty.

The lilies of the field are clothed with beauty to manifest the divine glory and to minister to our delight. Because of His great admiration of beauty, God made so many beautiful things, thereby ministering to our pleasure as well as to our needs.

Flowers tell us something that cannot be expressed in words. They bring to the sick room something that medicine cannot give and words cannot convey. When death removes a loved one, and words seem inappropriate or inadequate, we present some beautiful flowers.

Lilies do not have a mirror or vanity bag, and they do not worry about whether or not they are beautiful, but they go right on with their main task, which is that of growing. Because of this, their beauty surpasses the glory of kings. The glory of a monarch is a changeable thing. Solomon

was wise, rich, and proud. He had a wealth of possessions at which men marvelled. When the Queen of Sheba came from afar to visit him, she was not only amazed at Solomon's wisdom, but was overwhelmed by his opulence -- gold and silver, prancing steeds, flaunting peacocks, sweet-smelling spices, and precious stones. The wealth of many lands had contributed to his magnificence. The Queen had never beheld such evidences of splendor. Solomon, gorgeously attired in the most superb robes of costly silks, rich satins, and glowing brocades, all adorned with scintillating gems, moved about with regal solemnity, very conscious of his wisdom and wealth. Such glory, Christ said, was not to be compared with the enchanting loveliness and beauty of the lilies.

True beauty is not what is put on from without, but what is expressed from within. The state of one's mind, heart, and soul is far more important than one's dress. The pure heart is of more importance and consequence than the pretty face. Solomon's inner life did not match his gorgeous robes and outward glory. It is far better to be clad in rags and express in one's life the Christian qualities of purity, pity, mercy, and kindness than to be dressed in the richest and costliest of garments and be poor and barren of soul.

2. The watchfulness of God.

It is quite apparent that Someone is looking after and caring for the lilies. God takes care of them even when they grow among thorns. Our Lord does not want us to be anxious and worry about external, material things, but He does want us to trust Him to watch over us and to supply our needs.

President Calvin Coolidge had enough wisdom and calm acceptance of life to be spared a lot of the vanity that has often marked great men who were engaged in political activities. One day his secretary caught him taking a nap in his office in the middle of the afternoon. Coolidge awakened, and, seeing his secretary standing by with a look of amazement on his face, merely said, "Well, is the country still here?" President Coolidge knew very well that the United States, or Congress, or the White House would not pass from the world picture due to his sleepiness. It was not Coolidge's world, but God's world. And the sooner you and I come to a similar realization and confession of both our weakness and God's strength, the better it will be for us. As certainly as God watched over and cared for the lilies, He will do as much for us who are His children.

3. The virtue of contentment.

Lilies grow without anxiety. They are content to be what and as God made them. They never fret and worry because of the heat, the cold, the drought, or the rain. Inasmuch as anxiety spoils all present blessings and encumbers today with that which belongs to tomorrow, it is as foolish for us to worry as it would be for the lilies to attempt to spin. Why should we be troubled about food and raiment when God, Who knows what we need, has promised to provide them for us?

4. The joy of usefulness.

Lilies bloom to brighten the lives of others. Since they are a blessing to others, our lives should be devoted to being useful and helpful. One

reason that we have not grown more as Christians is because we have not been willing to give ourselves in the service of Christ and of others. If God has blessed you with ability, then use it. If God has blessed you with opportunity, then use it. If God has blessed you with a vision of His face, then tell others about that vision for His glory. If God has placed money in your hands, then dedicate it to Him. Submit yourself to His will, open your heart to receive what He longs to give you, and open your hands to pass on to others what He longs to give them through you.

5. The transitoriness of life.

The lilies of the field soon fade and pass away; but while their brief life lasts they fill their place and render their service. Our Lord compared human life to a flower which flourisheth in the morning, but withereth in the evening. We are here but a short time, but while we are here we have a place to fill which no one else can occupy, and a work to do which no one else can perform.

6. The inevitability of death.

Even though the lilies are beautiful and useful, they will fade away and disappear. It is inevitable that we shall die.

7. The certainty of the resurrection.

The life of the lilies disappears and goes into the roots. The next spring they feel the thrill of a new life, are drawn up into the sunshine, and expand in beauty. The lilies remind us that we, too, shall live again after we have died and been buried. God, Who gives surpassing beauty to the lilies that bloom for a brief period, will give a yet surer and greater beauty to Him human flowers who are to bloom through all eternity.