

CONSIDER THE LILIES

"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.

Jesus drew a great many illustrations from nature, and well He might, because these things are all about us. It was Shakespeare who said that there are sermons in trees and stones and running brooks.

With the Master as our interpreter, we are going to listen reverently and attentively and hopefully, I trust, to a winsome preacher whose name is The Lily. As we look and listen, we are at once impressed by the personality of this preacher. "How attractive!", we say to ourselves. "How wonderfully magnetic!" In spite of our natural listlessness and spiritual stupidity we become eager and attentive. We find ourselves tingling with a delightful thrill of expectancy. In our attempt to consider the lilies, we shall think of:

I. Their Loveliness.

Christ Jesus, Who above all others has the seeing eye and the understanding heart, is lavish in His praise of their loveliness. He said, "Verily, I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Of course, some of us are too blind to agree with the Master. If we saw a lily and Solomon standing side by side we would doubtless give all our attention to Solomon. That is true from the simple fact that so many of us are more interested in the counterfeit than in 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 lily?

1. It is not its richness of adornment.

It is not in the wealth of what it has in its pocket. Some people are worth only the money they possess. In themselves they are worth nothing. All their wealth is external to them. Theirs is not the wealth of the loveliness of the lily.

2. It is not in its rank.

Christ Jesus did not call attention to the beauty and loveliness of the flower pot in which the lily grew. He did not command us to consider what a skilled piece of work the flower pot was, how showily it was gilded. He did not call attention to the lily because it bloomed in the temple. Its glory was not a glory 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.

3. It is not in its social position.

Our attention is not directed to the lily because of its aristocratic neighbors. It may have had the most select social circle. It may have had a Marechal Neil and an American Beauty as its next-door neighbors, or it may have been rubbed against a sour dock on one side and a ragweed on the other side. Nettles and nightshade may have flourished in the same block. But its glory was not the glory of its social position.

4. It is inherent in itself.

What is the glory that this lily possesses?

(1) Naturalness.

As you stand in the presence of the lily you are impressed with its sincerity, its utter freedom from affectation and cant. You cannot believe that it is simply putting on a lily face to hide a dog fennel heart. You are impressed that it is just what it seems to be and no more.

What a fine virtue is genuineness, frankness, or open-hearted sincerity! How repellent is counterfeit, hypocrisy, insincerity! What poor creatures we 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 restful and helpful and genuinely charming about one whom you can know to be transparently sincere and true.

(2) Unspottedness.

You cannot stand in the presence of the lily without being impressed, and arrested, and even made heart hungry by its purity. So it still remains true that genuine goodness, 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 always carry a white flower. And one night when one of these mission workers was sitting talking to an outcast woman to the surprise of the worker the woman suddenly began to weep. And 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 and dirty life.

The lily is unspotted. What a virtue is that in the teacher! What a supreme requirement in the preacher! It is the one requirement without which he can never be at his best. He may fail in culture or eloquence. He may fail in a thousand ways, but if he succeeds in this he will not be without a hearing and men will be helped as they hear him.

And let us not forget that the same God who gives spotlessness to the lily can and will give it to you and me. He is able and there is no other who is able. His Word says, "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow." So you see we have in this lily the very graces that we need most and desire most for ourselves.

II. Their Life.

As we look down into the face of this lovely flower we might say, "You are genuine, guileless, 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?" It answers, "No, I grew." "Consider the lilies of the field how they grow." "I have arrived where I am today not all at once, but little by little."

Then, it speaks to us in somewhat this fashion, "There is another fact that you must not forget. And that is that while I grew I did not do so independently. Back of my birth is God. It was through Him that I began to live. It is through Him that I have continued to live. He is the source of all my beauty. You see this garment that I wear. Human fingers never wove one so beautiful. It was woven by His hands. It is from Him that all my growth has come. It is in His soil that I rooted myself and it is His sun that has warmed me and lighted my way." And what the lily is trying to tell us is that we too may grow. As we see its winsomeness we too would like to grow. So we say to this lily, "How did you manage to grow? Did you get restless and worried and anxious? Did you fret yourself into growth and beauty?" It answers, "No, I did not grow by worrying about it. I have not attained the height to which I have attained through anxiety." The secret of the lily is its restfulness, its utter freedom from worry. It preaches a wonderfully convincing sermon against our care-filled and harassed and troubled lives. It tells us that we will never really grow till we trust God enough to stop our fretting and our worrying. Anxiety cannot beneficially alter anything. It can do nothing that is good, but it can and does cause much mischief. How did this lily grow?

1. By being submissive to the Divine will.
It yielded itself in glad submission to what God intended for it to be. It was content to be what it was and where it was. I wonder if you have become thus wise? I wonder if you have learned that God's way is best?
2. By appropriating what God provides.
It learned simply to take what God gave it day by day and night by night. After it learned simply that, it never wanted.
3. By sharing with others.
After it began to grow the bees and humming birds would come for its sweetness and the winds stole its perfume. It became afraid that it would have nothing left. When it tried to hold the wealth that God had given it, it began withering. It learned that the fine art of living is the art of giving.

III. Their Lessons.

1. The ministry of beauty.
They do not seek to deck themselves with gay and gaudy attire from without; all their adornment and ornament are from within. The lily is clothed with beauty to minister to our delight and manifest the Divine glory. What richness of coloring in that flower! We should cultivate an admiration for the beautiful.
2. The power of God.
He is Almighty. The variety in the color, size, and form of the lily is an evidence of God's power. His resources are boundless.
3. The watchfulness of God.
God takes care of the lilies and the grass. They do not grow by chance. They often grow among thorns, yet, they are cared for. Men are better than flowers.
4. The virtue of contentment.
Other flowers may grow in more conspicuous places; their colors may be more gay; but the lily is content to be as God made it. Lilies grow without anxiety. They never fret and worry because of the heat, cold, and drought, or rain.

Anxiety is a power for much mischief. It blinds the eyes, so that there is no vision of God and heaven. It deafens the ears, so that the voice of God's promises cannot be heard. It palsies the tongue in the direction of praise. It spoils all present blessings. It wastes the passing moment. It encumbers today with that which belongs to tomorrow. It is as foolish as though the lilies were to begin to spin.
5. The joy of usefulness.
The lily is unselfish. It is a blessing to others. One reason we have not grown more is because we have been unwilling to serve and give. It is true literally that, "He that saveth his life shall lose it." If God has blessed you with ability, use it. If God has blessed you with opportunity, use it. If God has blessed you with a vision of His face, tell that vision for His glory. If God has put money in your hands, dedicate it to Him. Submit yourself to His will. Open your heart to receive what He longs to give you. Open your hands to pass on to others what He longs to give them. Then, you will approach more and more to the winsome beauty of the lily.
6. The certainty of death.
Even the lily must die. Though it is beautiful, it will soon die and decay.
7. The hope of the resurrection.
The lily is the reminder of immortality. You are to live again. You are to live forever. Remember, therefore, that God, who gives such surpassing beauty to the lily that blooms for a day, will give a yet surer and greater beauty to you human flowers who are to bloom through all eternity.