

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.

No one can read Christ's Sermon on the Mount without realizing that He was a master teacher and adept at using the common things of life in the presentation of divine truth.

As Christ sat on the side of the mountain teaching His disciples, it seemed as though He used everything in sight for the purpose of pointing men to His heavenly Father and for bringing them to the knowledge of salvation. Nothing escaped His vision. His Father's world was a wonderful place to Him, rich in the glories of His creative work. All that He beheld reminded Him of phases of truth and provided Him with illustrative material. To Him every star, every bird, every tree, and every flower had its message. He drew a great many illustrations from nature, and well He might, because these things are all about us. As Shakespeare said, "There are sermons in trees and stones and running brooks."

When Christ invited His disciples to "consider the lilies," He was about to lead them into some of the most profound truths of the Christian life. He looked upon the handiwork of His Father as a revelation of God's person, power, and will.

With Christ as our interpreter, we are going to listen reverently, attentively, and hopefully, I trust, to a winsome preacher whose name is The Lily. As we shall look and listen, we shall be impressed greatly by the personality of this preacher. To ourselves we shall say, "How attractive!" and "How wonderfully magnetic!" In spite of our natural listlessness and spiritual stupidity we shall become attentive and eager. We shall find ourselves tingling with a delightful thrill of expectancy. Properly rendered the word "consider" means "observe closely." Very few of us are as close observers as we should be. Everything in nature is a print of God, a letter to us from the pen of God. The heavens above us a great scroll written all over by the hand of God. The earth is dotted over with sweet messages from Him. Blessed is he who reads as he passes through this world. From the smallest atom to the brightest star nature has a voice, but, alas, how dull of hearing are our ears! The little bee finds sweetness in every flower. There is a divine sweetness for us in every flower if we would only take time to gather it.

Our Lord spent much of His earthly life in the country and in the open air. He took His disciples with Him into the mountains. Together they walked through the grain-fields and they sat under the shade of the old olive trees. They listened to the birds and looked at the flowers.

To those who may be wearied with the strain of life He says, "Consider the lilies." Some may smile at the idea, in the light of their struggle to make ends meet they may ask, "How can we be expected to imitate the lilies with their carefree life in the sunshine? Was Christ really serious when He said, "Consider the lilies"? The answer is "yes."

Christ was not trying to get His followers to get rid of work, but rather of worry. Worry is what brings the strain into life, so that the temper gets fretted, and friction wears us out. Worry is anxiety about tomorrow and the things which are not within our control, but which God will take care of, if we will let Him. Christ

offers a way of freedom from this strain. It is to trust God fully with all things.

On every page of the book of nature are valuable lessons to be learned. We should study them in the spirit of love, and devotion. In our attempt to consider the lilies, I want to emphasize three things:—

I. Their Loveliness.

Christ, Who above all others has the seeing eye and the understanding heart, was 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 would not agree with Christ. If we could see a lily and Solomon standing side by side, we would give our attention to Solomon. We like tinsel better than we do real gold.

What is the secret of the compelling loveliness of the lily?

1. It is not in its richness of adornment.

It is not in the wealth of what it has. Some people are worth only the money they possess. In themselves they are not worth anything. All their wealth is external to them.

2. It is not in its rank.

Christ did not call attention to the lilies because of where they grew. The glory of the lily was not one of rank or position. Yet, that is the only glory that some people ever get. Apart from the glory of rank to which they were born they do not have any glory at all.

3. It is not in its social position.

Christ did not direct our attention to the lily because of its aristocratic neighbors. It may have rubbed against a sour dock on one side and a ragweed on the other side. Its glory was not the glory of its social position.

4. It is inherent in itself.

What is the glory that the 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 genuineness is! How repellent is counterfeit, hypocrisy, and 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 helpful and charming about one whom you know to be transparently sincere and true.

(2) Unspottedness.

You cannot stand in the presence of the lily without being impressed and made heart hungry by its purity. Even so, genuine goodness, or thorough unspottedness, is the most winsome virtue that this world know.

Mission workers in the East End of London always used to carry a white flower. One night when one of these workers was sitting 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 and dirty life.

The lily is unspotted. What a virtue that is in any life! It is the one requirement without which one can never be his best. The same God Who gives spotlessness to the lily can and will give it to you and me. His Word says, "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow."

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." That is why Christ challenged His followers to "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin."

The lily speaks to us in somewhat this fashion, "I have arrived where I am today not all at once, but little by little. 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 was God. It was through Him that I began to live. It is through Him that I have begun 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." "Lilies grew throughout Palestine. They grew in the plain, by the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and in close proximity to the far-famed rose of Sharon. Wherever God placed it, the lily pushed up its modest stalk and expanded its petals in such a manner as to make the place more beautiful.

The lily tells Christians that they, too, may grow. We say to it, "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, like you human beings do." The lily preaches a wonderfully convincing sermon against our care-filled, harrassed and troubled lives. How does the lily grow?

1. By being submissive to the divine will.

The lily simply yielded itself in glad submission to what God intended it to be. It was content to be what it was and where it was. I wonder if you have learned to be content where you are? I wonder if you have learned that God's way is best?

2. By appropriating what God provides.

The lilies turn their faces toward the light. They draw their beauty from the sun. They open their chalice to receive, with gracious willingness, each dew-drop and each shower that God so gently sends. Rooted in the ground, they drink up such nourishment as the soil has to yield to them. As Christians, we should receive that which God has to give to us. Day by day appropriate what God provides and you will not be disappointed.

3. By sharing with others.

After the lily grew the bees and humming birds came for its sweetness and the winds stole its perfume. When the lily became afraid that it would not have anything left, and tried to hold the wealth that God had given it, it began to wither. It learned that the fine art of living is the art of giving.

III. Their Lessons.

1. The ministry of beauty.

Lilies do not seek to deck themselves with gay and gaudy attire from without; all their adornment and ornamentation are from within. They are clothed with beauty to minister to our delight and to manifest the divine glory. Let us cultivate an admiration for the beautiful!

Because the lily is a thing of beauty, we look at it with great delight. How much more beautiful it is when viewed under a powerful microscope! The looms of men do not produce beauty comparable to the looms of God. When an old Scotchman was asked to look at a bit of heather under the microscope, he stood for a few moments in awed amazement as he beheld the delicacy and beauty of the flower which was so wonderfully revealed. Then, choking with emotion, he said, "I wish I had not looked at it. It makes me feel badly to think of all those beautiful things I have been tramping needlessly all these years. I did not know before that a bit of heather was so intricately made."

2. The power of God.

The variety in the color, size, and form of the lilies is an evidence of God's power. The resources of God are unlimited.

3. The watchfulness of God.

God takes care of the lilies. They do not grow by chance. He cares for them, even when they grow among thorns. If God cares for the

flowers how much more will He care for His children.

Calvin Coolidge had enough good sense and calm acceptance of life to be spared of much of the vanity that has often marked great men in politics. One day his secretary caught him taking a nap in the middle of the afternoon, right in the presidential office. Coolidge awakened, and seeing his secretary standing by with a look of amazement on his face said merely: "Well, is the country still here?" He knew very well that the White House, or Congress, or the United States would not pass from the world picture because of the president's sleepiness. It was not Coolidge's world, but God's world. The sooner you and I come to a similar confession of our weakness and God's strength, the better it will be for our personal happiness, our homes, our businesses, and our professional outlook. God will not let us down, but He will watch over His own.

4. The virtue of contentment.

Other flowers may grow in more conspicuous places than the lily; 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, rain, or drought. Anxiety 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 spoils all present blessings. It wastes the passing moments. It encumbers today with that which belongs to tomorrow. It is as foolish as it would be for the lilies to toil like the men or to spin like the women.

5. The joy of usefulness.

The lily is a blessing to others. One reason why some of us have not grown more as Christians is because we have been unwilling to serve and give. If God has blessed you with ability, use it for Him and for others. If God has blessed you with a vision of His face, then tell that vision for His glory. If God has put money in your hands, dedicate it to Him. Yield yourself to the doing of 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 through you. Then, you will approach more and more to the winsome beauty of the lily.

6. The certainty of death.

Even the lily must die and decay, in spite of its beauty.

7. The hope of the resurrection.

The lily is a 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.