

Righteousness by Faith – From Gardening

#0105

Study given by W.D. Frazee – March 12, 1975

I'm so thankful for the Bible. Aren't you? And I'm so glad that the Lord arranged to have four different men write the life of Jesus. It must be the most important part of the Bible – the life of Jesus. So much of these four gospels is a record of what Jesus said. His name is called the Word of God. He is God's thought made audible. He came to this world to share God's thinking with us. And if we listen to what He says, we will understand God's thoughts.

“And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith?” Luke 12:25-28.

The lesson we are going to study deals not so much with the *physical* clothing – the dresses and suits and shoes that we wear -- but rather we're going to think especially about the *spiritual* clothing. This is connected with the lessons from the lilies in the garden.

This is a wonderful text for every gardener. I hope you all are gardeners. If you've not yet gotten into the joy of it, I hope you will. Jesus put our first parents in a Garden. And all through these 6,000 years, He's been drawing wonderful lessons from the growing of fruits and vegetables and flowers and trees.

Now keep in mind we're looking at the relationship between clothing and gardening and the spiritual experience.

“I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations” Isaiah 61:10-11.

What is God's program for giving us righteousness? In the 10th verse, He illustrates it by a *garment* that clothes us, or *covers* us. In the 11th verse, He illustrates it by referring to the garden. Each of these illustrations has certain lessons for us.

Suppose it's springtime and I'm anxious for a crop, whether it be radishes or carrots or lettuce or tomatoes. Suppose I get out and stir up the ground. Then I put the seed in. Then I kneel down and pray. The thought comes to me that if I would pray all night, that perhaps I could get a crop tomorrow. *Could* the Lord do that? What would we *call* that? A miracle. Don't you wish that we could mature Christian character like that? Or *do* you wish it?

I read:

“Christ Himself calls our attention to the growth of the vegetable world as an illustration of the agency of His Spirit in sustaining spiritual life” *Acts of the Apostles*, page 284.

Next August we will be picking grapes. What is going to happen between now and then? The sap will be coming. The vine will be spreading out its roots in the ground, drinking in the water and sucking up the nourishment. The leaves will come out. They will breathe in the carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. The sunshine will work upon the green leaves. Under its influence, acting on the chlorophyll, that carbon dioxide from the air and the water from the roots will be changed into grape sugar. It's going to take every day from now until August to do it. And the vines have already been planted.

The sap of the vine, ascending from the root, is diffused to the branches, sustaining growth and producing blossoms and fruit. So the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Saviour, pervades the soul, renews the motives and affections, and brings even the thoughts into obedience to the will of God, enabling the receiver to bear the precious fruit of holy deeds” *Ibid*, page 284.

Do we see God working out in the vineyard? No. Is He at work? Yes. Do we see God working in human hearts? No. Is He working? Yes.

“The Author of this spiritual life is unseen, and the exact method by which that life is imparted and sustained, it is beyond the power of human philosophy to explain” *Ibid*.

So when someone has it all explained by psychology or philosophy or theology or any other way, you can be sure he doesn't have the right answer. Because it's *beyond* that.

“Yet the operations of the Spirit are always in harmony with the written word. As in the natural, so in the spiritual world” *Ibid*.

How are things in the spiritual? As in the natural.

“The natural life is preserved moment by moment by divine power; yet it is not sustained by a direct miracle, but through the use of blessings placed within our reach” *Ibid.*

Are there manifestations of the power of God that are not miracles? Yes. The plant is living and growing day by day; the child is living and growing day by day – but not by a direct miracle.

When Jesus turned the water into grape juice, that was a direct miracle. When He took five little barley loaves and multiplied them by His word to feed 10,000 people, that was a direct miracle. But when He grows grain on the hillside using the sunshine and the rain, and you and I cooperating with Him in tilling the soil, that’s not a direct miracle.

But let me hasten to say, friends: it’s just as much the power of God one way or the other. It takes just as much of the power of God to grow grapes, and take months to do it, as it did for Jesus to turn the water into wine instantly – just as much the power of God.

Well then, why does God stretch it out? There are several reasons. One is that you and I can have a change to do something besides just watching. Aren’t you glad He gives us a part? I’m glad we can till the soil, cut out the weeds, prune the vines, and take care of the garden. Think of the joy we get and the health we get and the fellowship we share.

We sit at the table and the food is where? It’s within our reach. But we don’t get a single calorie by *looking* at a piece of bread or hearing *lectures* about it. It’s the bread that I take and put into my mouth and chew and swallow. That’s where I get the iron and phosphorous and amino acids and starch and protein.

“So the spiritual life is sustained by the use of those means that Providence has supplied” *Ibid.*

No matter how much we eat, our bodies have no way of appropriating enough food in 24 hours to last us a year. No matter how much fertilizer or water we put on the garden, there is no way to give it enough so that it takes care of itself from here on out. Neither is there any way that we can put enough food in a boy or enough work on a garden so that miraculously things happen overnight.

Yet this is exactly what multitudes of people are looking for *religiously*. This is why there is such a response to these fanatical, excitable movements that are occupying the center of the stage in many religious circles today and the Pentecostal movements and fringe movements that go along with them. They appeal to the

emotions, the excitement. People want something to touch them, to *electrify* them, so that from then on they have nothing to worry about. Everything is all settled.

There is an experience of being born again – of being converted. That's like the birth of a child or the germination of a seed. But what we are studying tonight is that growth that continues. Stones don't grow, and dead seeds don't grow. But live Christians must grow just as gardens grow. They must grow gradually, day by day, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, using the means that God has provided.

“God does not generally work miracles to advance His truth. If the husbandman neglects to cultivate the soil, God works no miracle to counteract the sure results. He works according to great principles made known to us, and it is our part to mature wise plans and set in operation the means whereby God shall bring about certain results” *Christian Service*, page 228.

Even if I go to prayer meeting and pray hard and get friends to unite *with* me, none of that takes the place of my getting a hoe and cutting the weeds. Prayer is not a *substitute* for action. We are to *cooperate* with God.

So it is God that causes the seeds to grow. We couldn't grow roses or strawberries by ourselves. We *can't* do it without God, and God *doesn't* do it without us.

Turn over to the epistle of James. Some of us have been gardening already this year, and some of these lessons will be illustrated by the experience we have had. I hope all of us will be doing some gardening in the coming weeks. And these lessons we are studying from the Bible tonight will help us in our gardening, and the gardening will repeat these lessons.

“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” James 5:7-8.

What does husbandman mean? The farmer, the gardener – the one who looks after the crops. What does the husbandman do? He waits. We know he does some things while he's waiting. He doesn't just sit down under a tree and watch the crops day in and day out. But when he has prepared the soil and put in the seed, then he has to wait. Then, by and by, he may cultivate. Then again he has to wait. There are times when he has to wait for rain. Were any of you praying after you got your garden in?

“Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.” That's harvest time. Oh, friends, the thought that I pray that God may make very real and precious to us is this: He has promised to give us a crop in our character building.

And He wants us to have such trust in Him that we will patiently wait the working of His Spirit in our hearts.

Oh, but we want it right now. We would like to *feel* like Jesus and *act* like Jesus and *be* like Jesus all in a moment.

Well, dear friends, we can *choose* it all in a moment, and God *counts* it that way (that's righteousness by faith), but the actual *development* is like the lily, like the apple tree, like the fruit, as the garden bring forth these precious fruits.

We have a statement of great significance on this:

"The prophets and apostles did not perfect Christian character by a miracle" *The Sanctified Life*, page 83.

Did they perfect Christian character? Apparently, that's what this says. But it tells us how they didn't do it. How? They didn't do it by a miracle. Did they do it by themselves? Oh, no. But God didn't suddenly swoop down on Elijah or Moses or Peter or Paul, and from that time they were instantly sanctified. No, that didn't happen.

"They used the means which God had placed within their reach; and all who will put forth the same effort will secure the same results" *Ibid*.

That's a tremendous promise. Can I have what Elijah and Jacob and Daniel got? Yes, if I will stir the soil, put in the seeds, and keep out the weeds. If I will pray and work with God, I can have a garden too.

Have you heard about people who have a green thumb? They use not only the thumb, but all the other fingers. They work. It's not some magic. "And all who will put forth the same effort will secure the same results." Aren't you glad, friends? Thank God, it will work for us if we will follow the directions. And remember, that means to have patience, to keep on – praying, studying, putting forth the effort to live the Christian life. Prayer is the breath of the soul. In the word of God, we receive the nourishment for our spiritual life. The word of God is like seed that we put in the garden. So in the study of God's Word and in prayer, we are doing the things that He has outlined to make the crop grow, to make our spiritual life grow. This is the way that we are to develop in the things of God.

We have an interesting statement from the Spirit of Prophecy, taken from an old *Signs of the Times* article. It makes plain something that I think will help someone here tonight:

"No one who claims holiness is really holy. Those who are registered as holy in the books of heaven are not aware of the fact, and are the last ones to boast of their own goodness" *Signs of the Times*, February 26, 1885.

So when Jesus, in the sanctuary above, closes the records of heaven and says, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still, and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still, and he that is holy, let him be holy still," the saints down here in this world will not be saying, "I'm sanctified, I'm holy, I have arrived." No. This is the paradox of it.

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If this is so with Daniel and Paul and John, it must be true of you and me, don't you think so? Looking into the future, if we know that we will not be able to say that we have arrived (God in Heaven writes it down, but we don't see it), then should I make any effort right now to see that I have arrived, and to find satisfaction in my own holiness? No. That will be disappointing. It will lead me to either to make false claims or to get discouraged.

"The more nearly they resemble Christ, the more they lament their unlikeness to him, for their consciences are sensitive, and they regard sin more as God regards it. ...Their hearts are humbled under a sense of their own unworthiness..." *Ibid.*

Think of Daniel's experience, how he humbled himself and confessed his sinful condition and the sins of his people. And when the angel messenger and Christ, the Son of God, came and appeared to him, how it left him without strength under a sense of his own weakness and unworthiness. Yet the angel said, "Daniel, you are a man greatly beloved in heaven."

As we look at the flowers growing on the hillsides, as we stir the soil and plant the seeds and take care of them, as we look after our own bodies for health and strength, let us learn the precious lessons – that, just as God is growing things in the garden as we cooperate with Him, and just as He is strengthening our health and causing the children to grow, as human being share with Him. And yet, it isn't done in a second, all in a day. Gradually, day by day, the growth continues in the garden and in the human family. So in the spiritual life, God is at work. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow."

My one of my favorite texts on this is Philippians the 1st chapter and the 6th verse. Many of you know it. But it fits in right here, just like it was made for it.

"Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" Philippians 1:6.

The husbandman who puts out the grape vines expects one day to pick the fruit. Praise God, Jesus expects to pick the fruit in our lives of righteous characters. If we do not see the purple grapes today, let's keep taking care of the vineyard and asking God

for the sunshine and rain, shall we? Knowing that He which has begun a good work in us will finish it.

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” Hebrews 12:1-2.

Patience doesn't mean to quit running. It doesn't mean to cease to make any effort. It doesn't mean 'let go and let God.' It doesn't mean to say, “Well, I tried and tried. I found out I couldn't do anything, so I just quit and turned everything over to God.” Please don't try that on your garden. And if you have tried in a poor human way in your spiritual experience, and it hasn't worked, don't run to the other extreme and leave it all with God and do nothing. As in the gardening and care of our physical health, so in the spiritual. We are going to *run*. We are going to do all we can, but we are going to do it with *patience*.

“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” What does 'author' mean? Jesus *began* it. 'Finisher' means He is going to *complete* it. It is Jesus all the way through. But we are working *with* Him. We can't do it without Him, and He won't do it without us. And we are to do it with *patience*.

'Patience' means waiting, but it doesn't mean sleeping while we wait. We are to do everything we can to accomplish the result. But no matter how hard we work, and no matter how earnestly we pray, we can't make strawberries bloom and get big and red and ripe all in 24 hours. No matter if we have a prayer meeting and pray all night, it won't work that way.

Don't misunderstand me. Prayer is a blessing in our spiritual life. But all the praying in the world will not produce a mature Christian character in 24 hours. Therefore, we must have the faith that keeps us doing day by day that which God has outlined.

I'm so thankful that He gives us so many illustrations in the world of nature to teach us how to cooperate with Him.

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W.D. Frazee Sermons
P.O. Box 129, Wildwood, GA 30757
1-800-WDF-1840 / 706-820-9755
www.WDFsermons.org
support@WDFsermons.org