

Frost And Thaw

DELIVERED ON SUNDAY EVENING, DECEMBER 24, 1865,

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"He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes; He casts out His hail like morsels. Who can stand before His cold? He sends out His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow, and the waters flow." [Psalm 147:16-18](#).

LOOKING out of our window one morning we saw the earth robed in a white mantle—in a few short hours the earth had been covered to a considerable depth with snow. We looked out again in a few hours and saw the fields as green as ever and the plowed fields as bare as if no single flake had fallen! It is no uncommon thing for a heavy fall of snow to be followed by a rapid thaw. These interesting changes are worked by God, not only with a purpose toward the outward world, but with some design toward the spiritual realm. God is always a teacher. In every action that He performs He is instructing His own children and opening up to them the road to inner mysteries.

Happy are those who find food for their Heaven-born spirits, as well as for their mental powers in the works of the Lord's hand. I shall ask your attention, first, to the operations of nature spoken of in the text. And, secondly, to those operations of Divine Grace of which they are the most fitting symbols.

I. Consider first, THE OPERATIONS OF NATURE. We shall not think a few minutes wasted if we call your attention to the hand of God in frost and thaw, even upon natural grounds.

1. Observe the directness of the Lord's work. I rejoice as I read these words, to find how present our God is in the world. It is not written, "the laws of nature produce snow," but, "HE gives snow," as if every flake came directly from the palm of His hand. We are not told that certain natural regulations form moisture into frost—no, but as Moses took ashes of the furnace and scattered them upon Egypt, so it is said of the Lord, "HE scatters the frost like ashes." It is not said that the Eternal has set the world going, and by the operation of its machinery ice is produced. Oh no, but every single granule of ice descending in the hail is from God—"HE casts out His hail like morsels."

Even as the slinger distinctly sends the stone out of his sling, so the path of every hailstone is marked by the Divine power. The hail is called, you observe, "His hail." And in the next sentence we read of His cold. These words make nature strangely magnificent. When we look upon every hailstone as God's hail, how precious the watery diamonds become! When we feel the cold nipping our limbs and penetrating through every garment, it consoles us to remember that it is His cold. When the thaw comes, see how the text speaks of it—"He sends out His word."

He does not leave it to certain forces of nature, but like a king, "He sends out His word and melts them; He causes HIS wind to blow." He has a special property in every wind—whether it comes from the north to freeze, or from the south to melt—it is HIS wind! Behold how in God's temple everything speaks of His Glory. Learn to see the Lord in all scenes of the visible universe, for truly He works all things.

This thought of the directness of the Divine operations must be carried into Providence. It will greatly comfort you if you can see God's hand in your losses and crosses. Surely you will not murmur against the direct agency of your God! This will put an extraordinary sweetness into daily mercies, and make the comforts of life more comfortable still, because they are from a Father's hand. If your table is scantily furnished it shall suffice for your contented heart when you know that your Father spread it for you in wisdom and love. This shall bless your bread and your water! This shall make the bare walls of an ill-furnished room as resplendent as a palace, and turn a hard bed into a couch of down.

My Father does it all. We see His smile of love even when others see nothing but the black hand of Death smiting our best beloved. We see a Father's hand when the pestilence lays our cattle dead upon the plain. We see God at work in mercy when we ourselves are stretched upon the bed of languishing. It is ever our Father's act and deed! Do not let us get beyond this—but rather let us enlarge our view of this Truth of God and remember that this is true of the little as well as of the great. Let the lines of a true poet strike you—"If pestilence stalks through the land, you say the Lord has done it—has He not done it when an aphid creeps upon the rosebud? If an avalanche tumbles from its Alp, you tremble at the will of Providence—is not that will as much concerned when the sere leaves fall from the poplar?" Let your hearts sing of everything—Jehovah-Shammah—the Lord is there.

2. Next, I beg you to observe with thanksgiving the ease of Divine working. These verses read as if the making of frost and snow were the simplest matter in all the world! A man puts his hand into a wool-pack and throws out the wool. God gives snow as easily as that! "He gives snow like wool." A man takes up a handful of ashes and throws them into the air so that they fall around. "He scatters the frost like ashes." Frost and snow are marvels of nature! Those who have observed the extraordinary beauty of the ice crystals have been enraptured, and yet they are like morsels—just as easily as we cast crumbs of bread outside the window to the robins during wintry days!

When the rivers are frozen hard, and the earth is held in iron chains, then the melting of the whole—how is that done? Not by kindling innumerable fires, nor by sending electric shocks from huge batteries through the interior of the earth—no—"He sends forth His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow, and the waters flow." The whole matter is accomplished with a word and a breath. If you and I had any great thing to do, what puffing and panting, what straining and tugging there would be! Even the great engineers who perform marvels by machinery make much noise and stir about it.

It is not so with the Almighty One. Our globe spins round in 24 hours, and yet it does not make so much noise as a humming top! And yonder ponderous worlds rolling in space track their way in silence. If I enter a factory I hear a deafening dropping over a wheel. There is a never ceasing click-clack, or an undying hum—but God's great wheels revolve without noise or friction! Divine machinery works smoothly. This case is seen in Providence as well as in nature. Your heavenly Father is as able to deliver you as He is to melt the snow, and He will deliver you in as simple a manner if you rest upon Him. He opens His hand and supplies the want of every living thing as readily as He works in nature. Mark the ease of God's working—He does but open His hand.

3. Notice in the next place the variety of the Divine operations in nature. When the Lord is at work with frost as His tool, He creates snow, a wonderful production—every crystal being a marvel of art. But then He is not content with snow—from the same water He makes another form of beauty which we call frost, and yet a third lustrous sparkling substance, namely glittering ice! And all these by the one agency of cold. What a marvelous variety the educated eye can detect in the several forms of frozen water!

The same God who solidified the flood with cold soon melts it with warmth. But even in thaw there is no monotony of manner—at one time the joyous streams rush with such impetuosity from their imprisonment that rivers are swollen and floods cover the plains. At another time, by slow degrees, in scanty dribbles, the drops regain their freedom. The same variety is seen in every department of nature. So in Providence the Lord has a thousand forms of frosty trials with which to try His people, and He has ten thousand beams of mercy with which to cheer and comfort them!

He can afflict you with the snow trial, or with the frost trial, or with the ice trial if He wills. And another time He can, with His word, relax the bonds of adversity, and that in countless ways. Whereas men are tied to two or three methods in accomplishing their will, God is infinite in understanding and works as He wills by ways unknown of mortal minds.

4. I shall ask you, also, to consider the works of God in nature in their swiftness. It was thought a wonderful thing in the days of Ahasuerus that letters were sent by post upon swift horses. In our country we thought we had arrived at the age of miracles when the axles of our cars glowed with speed, and now that the telegraph is at work we stretch out our hands into infinity! But what is our speed compared with that of God's operations? Well does the text say, "He sends forth His commandment upon earth: His word runs very swiftly." Forth went the word, "Open the treasures of snow," and the flakes descended in innumerable multitudes. And then it was said, "Let them be closed," and not another snow-feather was seen.

Then spoke the Master, "Let the south wind blow and the snow be melted," and it disappeared at the voice of His word. Believer, you cannot tell how soon God may come to your help. "He rode upon a cherub and did fly," says David, "Yes, He did fly upon the wings of

the wind." He will come from above to rescue His beloved. He will rend the heavens and come down! With such speed will He descend that He will not stay to draw the curtains of Heaven, but He will rend them in His haste and make the mountains flow down at His feet—that He may deliver those who cry unto Him in the hour of trouble. That mighty God who can melt the ice so speedily can take to Himself the same eagle wings and hasten to your deliverance. Arise, O God! And let Your children be helped, and that right quickly!

5. One other thought. Consider the goodness of God in all the operations of nature and Providence. Think of that goodness negatively. "Who can stand before His cold?" You cannot help thinking of the poor in a hard winter—only a hard heart can forget them when you see the snow lying deep. But suppose that snow continued to fall! What is there to hinder it? The same God who sends us snow for one day could do the like for fifty days if He pleased. Why not?

And when the frost pinches us so severely, why should it not be continued month after month? We can only thank the goodness which does not send "His cold" to such an extent that our spirits expire. Travelers towards the North Pole tremble as they think of this question, "Who can stand before His cold?" For cold has a degree of omnipotence in it when God is pleased to let it loose. Let us thank God for the restraining mercy by which He holds the cold in check.

Not only negatively, but positively there is mercy in the snow. Is not that a suggestive metaphor? "He gives snow like wool." The snow is said to warm the earth. It protects those little plants which have just begun to peep above ground and might otherwise be frostbitten. As with a garment of down the snow protects them from the extreme severity of cold. Watts sings, in his version of the hundred-and-forty-seventh Psalm—

"His flakes of snow like wool He sends, And thus the springing corn defends."

It was an idea of the ancients that snow warmed the heart of the soil, gave it fertility, and therefore they praised God for it. Certainly there is much mercy in the frost, for pestilence might run a far longer race if it were not that the frost cries to it, "Up to here shall you come, but no farther." Noxious insects would multiply until they devoured the precious fruits of the earth if sharp nights did not destroy millions of them so that these pests are swept from off the earth. Though man may think himself a loser by the cold, he is a great ultimate gainer by the decree of Providence which ordains winter!

The quaint saying of one of the old writers that, "snow is wool, and frost is fire, and ice is bread, and rain is drink," is true, though it sounds like a paradox. There is no doubt that frost, in breaking up the soil, promotes fruitfulness, and so the ice becomes bread. Thus those agencies which for the moment deprive our workers of their means of sustenance, are the means by which God supplies every living thing. Mark, then, God's goodness as clearly in the snow and frost as in the thaw which clears the winter's work away.

Christian, remember the goodness of God in the frost of adversity. Rest assured that when God is pleased to send out the biting winds of affliction He is in them, and He is always love—as much love in sorrow as when He breathes upon you the soft south wind of joy. See the loving-kindness of God in every work of His hand! Praise Him—He makes summer and winter—let your song go round the year! Praise Him—He gives day and sends night—thank Him at all hours! Cast not away your confidence, it has great recompense of reward.

As David wove the snow, and rain, and stormy wind into a song, even so combine your trials, your tribulations, your difficulties and adversities into a sweet Psalm of praise, and say perpetually—

"Let us, with a gladsome mind, Praise the Lord, for He is kind."

Thus much upon the operations of nature. It is a very tempting theme, but other fields invite me.

II. I would address you very earnestly and solemnly upon THOSE OPERATIONS OF GRACE OF WHICH FROST

AND THAW ARE THE OUTWARD SYMBOLS. There is a period with God's own people when He comes to deal with them by the frost of the Law. The Law is to the soul as the cutting north wind. Faith can see love in it, but the carnal eye of sense cannot. It is a cold, terrible, comfortless blast. To be exposed to the full force of the Law of God would be to be frostbitten with everlasting destruction. Even to feel it for a season would congeal the marrow of one's bones and make one's whole being stiff with fear. "Who can stand before His cold?"

When the Law comes forth thundering from its treasures, who can stand before it? The effect of law-work upon the soul is to bind up the rivers of human delight. No man can rejoice when the terrors of conscience are upon him. When the Law of God is sweeping through the soul, music and dancing lose their joy—the bowl forgets its power to cheer—and the enchantments of earth are broken. The rivers of pleasure freeze to icy despondency. The buds of hope are suddenly nipped and the soul finds no comfort.

It was satisfied once to grow rich, but rust and canker are now upon all gold and silver. Every promising hope is frost-bitten, and the spirit is winter-bound in despair. This cold makes the sinner feel how ragged his garments are. He could strut about when it was summer weather and think his rags right royal robes—but now the cold frost finds out every tear in his garments, and in the hands of the terrible Law he shivers like the leaves upon the aspen. The north wind of judgment searches the man through and through. He did not know what was in him, but now he sees his inward parts to be filled with corruption and rottenness.

These are some of the terrors of the wintry breath of the Law. This frost of Law and terrors only tends to harden. Nothing splits the rock or makes the cliff tumble like frost when succeeded by thaw, but frost alone makes the earth like a mass of iron breaking the plowshare which would seek to pierce it. A sinner under the influence of the Law of God,

apart from the Gospel, is hardened by despair and cries, "There is no hope, and therefore I will go after my lusts. Whereas there is no Heaven for me after this life, I will make a Heaven out of this earth! And since Hell awaits me, I will at least enjoy such sweets as sin may afford me here."

This is not the fault of the Law—the blame lies with the corrupt heart which is hardened by it. Nevertheless, such is its effect. When the Lord has worked by the frost of the Law, He sends the thaw of the Gospel. When the south wind blows from the land of promise bringing precious remembrances of God's fatherly pity and tender loving-kindness, then straightway the heart begins to soften and a sense of blood-bought pardon speedily dissolves it. The eyes fill with tears, the heart melts in tenderness, rivers of pleasure flow freely and buds of hope open in the cheerful air! A heavenly spring whispers to the flowers that were sleeping in the cold earth—they hear its voice, and lift up their heads, for "the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."

God sends His Word, saying, "Your warfare is accomplished, and your sin is pardoned." And when that blessedly cheering Word comes with power to the soul and the sweet breath of the Holy Spirit acts like the warm south wind upon the heart, then the waters flow and the mind is filled with holy joy, and light, and liberty!—

"The legal wintry state is gone, The frosts are fled, the spring comes on. The sacred turtledove we hear Proclaims the new, the joyful year." Having shown you that there is a parallel between frost and thaw in nature and Law and Gospel in Grace, I would utter the same thoughts concerning Grace which I gave you concerning nature.

1. We began with the directness of God's works in nature. Now, beloved Friends, remark the directness of God's works in Grace. When the heart is truly affected by the Law of God. When sin is made to appear exceedingly sinful. When carnal hopes are frozen to death by the Law. When the soul is made to feel its barrenness and utter death and ruin—this is the finger of God! Do not speak of the minister. It was well that he preached earnestly—God has used him as an instrument—but God works all.

When the thaw of Divine Grace comes, I pray you will discern the distinct hand of God in every beam of comfort which gladdens the troubled conscience, for it is the Lord, alone, who binds up the broken in heart and heals all their wounds! We are far too apt to stop in instrumentalities. Folly makes men look to sacraments for heart-breaking or heart-healing, but sacraments all say, "It is not in us." Some of you look to the preaching of the Word and look no higher. But all true preachers will tell you, "It is not in us."

Eloquence and earnestness at their highest pitch can neither break nor heal a heart. This is God's work! Yes, and not God's secondary work in the sense in which the philosopher admits that God is in the laws of nature—but God's personal and immediate work. He puts forth His own hand when the conscience is humbled, and it is by His own right hand that

the conscience is eased and cleansed. I desire that this thought may abide upon your minds for you will not praise God otherwise. Nor will you be sound in doctrine.

All departures from sound doctrine on the point of conversion arise from forgetfulness that it is a Divine work from first to last—that the faintest desire after Christ is as much the work of God as the gift of His dear Son—and that our whole spiritual history through, from the Alpha to the Omega, the Holy Spirit works in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure. As you have evidently seen the finger of God in casting forth His ice and in sending thaw, so I pray you recognize the handiwork of God in giving you a sense of sin and in bringing you to the Savior's feet. Join together in heartily praising the wonder-working God who does all things according to the counsel of His will—

"Our seeking Your face Was all of Your Grace!
Your mercy demands and shall have all the praise:
No sinner can be Beforehand with You,
Your Grace is preventing, almighty and free."

2. The second thought upon nature was the ease with which the Lord worked. There was no effort or disturbance. Transfer that to the work of Divine Grace. How easy it is for God to send law-work into the soul! You stubborn Preacher, you cannot touch him! And even Providence has failed to awaken him. He is dead—altogether dead in trespasses and sins! But if the glorious Lord will graciously send forth the wind of His Spirit, that will melt him.

The swearing reprobate, whose mouth is blackened with profanity—if the Lord does but look upon him and make bare His arm of Irresistible Grace—shall yet praise God and bless His name! And he will live to His honor. Do not limit the Holy One of Israel. Persecuting Saul became loving Paul, and why should not that person be saved of whose case you almost despair? Your husband may have many points which make his case difficult, but no case is desperate with God! Your son may have offended both against Heaven and against you, but God can save the most hardened. The sharpest frost of obstinate sin must yield to the thaw of Divine Grace. Even huge icebergs of crime must melt in the Gulf stream of infinite love.

Poor Sinner, I cannot leave this point without a word to you. Perhaps the Master has sent the frost to you, and you think it will never end. Let me encourage you to hope, and yet more, to pray for gracious visitations. Miss Steele's verses will just suit your mournful, yet hopeful state—

"Stern winter throws his icy chains,
Encircling nature round.
How bleak, how comfortless the plains,
Late with bright verdure crowned!
The sun withdraws his vital beams,

And light and warmth depart.
And, drooping lifeless, nature seems
 An emblem of my heart—
My heart, where mental winter reigns
 In night's dark mantle clad,
Confined in cold, inactive chains!
 How desolate and sad!
Return, O blissful sun, and bring
 Your soul-reviving ray—
This mental winter shall be spring,
 This darkness cheerful day."

It is easy for God to deliver you. He says, "I have blotted out like a thick cloud your transgressions." I stood the other evening looking up at a black cloud which was covering all the heavens and I thought it would surely rain. I entered the house and when I came out again the sky was all blue—the wind had driven the clouds away. So may it be with your soul. It is an easy thing for the Lord to put away sin from repenting sinners. All obstacles which hindered our pardon were removed by Jesus when He died upon the Cross, and if you believe in Him you will find that He has cast your sins into the depths of the sea! If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believe.

3. The next thought concerning the Lord's work in nature was the variety of it. Frost produces a sort of trinity in unity—snow, frost, ice—and when the thaw comes its ways are many. So is it with the work of God in the heart. Conviction comes not alike to all. Some convictions fall as the snow from Heaven—you never hear the flakes descend—they alight so gently one upon the other. There are softly coming convictions—they are felt, but we can scarcely tell when we began to feel them. A true work of repentance may be of the gentlest kind.

On the other hand, the Lord casts forth His ice like morsels—the hailstones rattle against the window and you think they will surely force their way into the room! And to many persons convictions come beating down till they remind you of hailstones. There is variety. It is as true a frost which produces the noiseless snow as that which brings forth the terrible hail. Why should you want hailstones of terror? Be thankful that God has visited you, but do not dictate to Him the way of His working.

With regard to the Gospel thaw. If you may but be pardoned by Jesus, do not stipulate as to the manner of His Grace. Thaw is universal and gradual, but its commencement is not always discernible. The chains of winter are unloosed by degrees—the surface ice and snow melt—and by-and-by the warmth permeates the entire mass till every rock of ice gives way. But while thaw is universal and visible in its effects you cannot see the mighty power which is doing all this. Even so you must not expect to discern the Spirit of God.

You will find Him gradually operating upon the entire man, enlightening the understanding, freeing the will, delivering the heart from fear, inspiring hope, waking up the whole spirit, gradually and universally working upon the mind and producing the manifest effects of comfort, and hope, and peace. But you can no more see the Spirit of God than you can see the south wind. The effect of His power is to be felt, and when you feel it, do not marvel if it is somewhat different from what others have experienced. After all, there is a singular likeness in snow and frost and ice, and so there is a remarkable sameness in the experience of all God's children! But there is still a great variety in the inward operations of Divine Grace.

4. We must next notice the rapidity of God's works. "His word runs very swiftly." It did not take many days to get rid of the last snow. A contractor would take many a day to cart it away, but God sends forth His word and the snow and ice disappear at once. So is it with the soul—the Lord often works rapidly when He cheers the heart. You may have been a long time under the operation of His frosty Law, but there is no reason why you should be another hour under it. If the Spirit enables you to trust in the finished work of Christ, you may go out of this house rejoicing that every sin is forgiven!

Poor Soul, do not think that the way from the horrible pit is to climb, step by step, to the top! Oh, no! Jesus can set your feet upon a rock before the clock shall have gone round the dial. He can, in an instant, bring you from death to life, from condemnation to justification. "Today shall you be with Me in Paradise," was spoken to a dying thief, black and defiled with sin. Only believe in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and you shall be saved!

5. Our last thought upon the operation of God was His goodness in it all. What a blessing that God did not send us more law-work than He did! "Who can stand before His cold?" Oh, Beloved, when God has taken away from man natural comfort and made him feel Divine wrath in his soul, it is an awful thing! Speak of a haunted man—no man need be haunted with a worse ghost than the remembrance of his old sins.

The childish tale of the sailor with the old man of the mountain on his back who pressed him more and more heavily is more than realized in the history of the troubled conscience. If one sin does but leap on a man's back it will sink the sinner through every standing place that he can possibly mount upon! He will go down, down, under its weight till he sinks to the lowest depths of Hell. There is no place where sin can be borne till you get upon the Rock of Ages—and even there the joy is not that you bear it—but that Jesus has borne it all for you!

The spirit would utterly fail before the Law if it had full sway. Thank God, "He stays His rough wind in the day of His east wind." At the same time, how thankful we may be that we ever felt the law frost in our soul. The folly of self-righteousness is killed by the winter of conviction. We should have been a thousand times more proud and foolish, and worldly

than we are if it had not been for the sharp frost with which the Lord nipped the growths of the flesh.

But how shall we thank Him sufficiently for the thaw of His loving-kindness? How great the change which His mercy made in us as soon as its beams had reached our soul! Hardness vanished! Cold departed! Warmth and love abounded, and the life-floods leaped in their channels! The Lord visited us and we rose from our grave of despair even as the seeds arise from the earth! As the bulb of the crocus holds up its golden cup to be filled with sunshine so did our new-born faith open itself to the Glory of the Lord!

As the primrose peeps up from the sod to gaze upon the sun, so did our hope look forth for the promise, and delight itself in the Lord. Thank God that spring tide has with many of us matured into summer, and winter has gone, never to return. We praise the Lord for this every day of our lives, and we will praise Him when time shall be no more in that sunny land—

"Where everlasting spring abides,
And never withering flowers.
A thread-like stream alone divides
That heavenly land from ours."

Believe in the Lord, you who shiver in the frost of the Law, and the law of love shall soon bring you warm days of joy and peace. So be it. Amen.