

Spring In The Heart

DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 11, 1866,

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You water the ridges abundantly: You settle the furrows: You make it soft with showers: You bless its growth." [Psalm 65:10](#).

THOUGH other seasons excel in fullness, spring must always bear the palm for freshness and beauty. We thank God when the harvest hours draw near and the golden grain invites the sickle, but we ought equally to thank Him for the rougher days of spring, for these prepare the harvest. April showers are mothers of the sweet May flowers, and the wet and cold of winter are the parents of the splendor of summer. God blesses its growth, or else it could not be said, "You crown the year with Your goodness." There is as much necessity for Divine benediction in spring as for heavenly bounty in summer, and therefore we should praise God all the year round.

Spiritual spring is a very blessed season in a Church. Then we see youthful piety developed and on every hand we hear the joyful cry of those who say, "We have found the Lord." Our sons are springing up as the grass and as willows by the watercourses. We hold up our hands in glad astonishment and cry, "Who are these that fly as a cloud and as doves to their windows?" In the revival days of a Church, when God is blessing her with many conversions, she has great cause to rejoice in God and sing, "You bless its growth."

I intend to take the text in reference to individual cases. There is a time of growth of Divine Grace when it is just in its bud, just breaking through the dull cold earth of unregenerate nature. I desire to talk a little about that and concerning the blessing which the Lord grants to the green blade of new-born godliness—to those who are beginning to hope in the Lord.

I. First, I shall have a little to say about THE WORK PREVIOUS TO THE GROWTH. It appears from the text that there is work for God, alone, to do before the growth comes. And we know that there is work for God to do through us as well. There is work for us to do. Before there can be growth in the soul there must be plowing, harrowing, and sowing. There must be a plowing and we do not expect that as soon as ever we plow we shall reap the sheaves. Blessed be God, in many cases the reaper overtakes the plowman! But we must not always expect it.

In some hearts God is long in preparing the soul by conviction—the Law with its ten black horses drags the plowshare of conviction up and down the soul till there is not one part of it left unfurrowed. Conviction goes deeper than any plow to the very core and center of the spirit till the spirit is wounded. The plowers make deep furrows, indeed, when God puts His hand to the work! The soil of the heart is broken in pieces in the Presence of the Most High. Then comes the sowing.

Before there can be a growth it is certain that there must be something put into the ground so that after the preacher has used the plow of the Law, he applies to his Master for the seed basket of the Gospel. Gospel promises, Gospel doctrines—especially a clear exposition of free Grace and the Atonement—these are the handfuls of corn which we scatter broadcast. Some of the grain falls on the highway and is lost. But other handfuls fall where the plow has been and there they abide. Then comes the harrowing work. We do not expect to sow seed and then leave it—the Gospel has to be prayed over. The prayer of the preacher and the prayer of the Church make up God's harrow to rake in the seed after it is scattered. And so it is covered up within the clods of the soul and is hidden in the heart of the hearer.

Now there is a reason why I dwell upon this, namely, that I may exhort my dear Brethren who have not seen success to not give up the work but to hope that they have been doing the plowing, and sowing, and harrowing work, and that the harvest is to come. I mention this for yet another reason—and that is by way of warning to those who expect to have a harvest without this preparatory work. I do not believe that much good will come from attempts at sudden revivals made without previous prayerful labor.

A revival to be permanent must be a matter of growth and the result of much holy effort, longing, pleading, and watching. The servant of God is to preach the Gospel whether men are prepared for it or not—but in order to large success, depend upon it—there is a preparedness necessary among the hearers. Upon some hearts, warm earnest preaching drops like an unusual thing which startles but does not convict. In other congregations, where good Gospel preaching has long been the rule, and much prayer has been offered, the words fall into the hearers' souls and bring forth speedy fruit.

We must not expect to have results without work. There is no hope of a Church having an extensive revival in its midst unless there is continued and importunate waiting upon God together with earnest laboring, intense anxiety, and hopeful expectation. But there is also a work to be done which is beyond our power. After plowing, sowing, and harrowing, there must come the shower from Heaven. "You visit the earth and water it," says the Psalmist. In vain are all our efforts unless God shall bless us with the rain of His Holy Spirit's influence.

Holy Spirit! You, and You alone work wonders in the human heart, and You come from the Father and the Son to do the Father's purposes and to glorify the Son! Three effects are spoken of. First, we are told He waters the ridges. As the ridges of the field become well saturated through and through with the abundant rain, so God sends His Holy Spirit till the whole heart of man is moved and influenced by His Divine operations. The understanding is enlightened, the conscience is quickened, the will is controlled, the affections are inflamed—all these powers, which I may call the ridges of the heart—come under the Divine working.

It is ours to deal with men as men, bring to bear upon them Gospel truth, and to set before them motives that are suitable to move rational creatures. But, after all, it is the rain from on high which alone can water the ridges! There is no hope of the heart being savingly affected except by Divine operations. Next it is added, "You settle the furrows," by which some think it is meant that the furrows are drenched with water. Others think there is an allusion here to the beating down of the earth by heavy rain till the ridges become flat—and by the soaking of the water—are settled into a more compact mass.

Certain it is that the influences of God's Spirit have a humbling and settling effect upon a man. He was unsettled once like the earth that is dry and crumbly, and blown about and carried away with every wind of doctrine. But as the earth, when soaked with wet, is compacted and knit together, so the heart becomes solid and serious under the power of the Spirit. As the high parts of the ridge are beaten down into the furrows, so the lofty ideas, the grand schemes, and carnal boastings of the heart begin to level down when the Holy Spirit comes to work upon the soul. Genuine humility is a very gracious fruit of the Spirit. To be broken in heart is the best means of preparing the soul for Jesus. "A broken and a contrite hear, O God, You will not despise." Brethren, always be thankful when you see high thoughts of man brought down! This settling the furrows is a very gracious preparatory work of Divine Grace.

Yet again, it is added, "You make it soft with showers." Man's heart is naturally hardened against the Gospel. Like the Eastern soil it is hard as iron if there is no gracious rain. How sweetly and effectively does the Spirit of God soften the man through and through! He is no longer towards the Word what he used to be—he feels everything, whereas once he felt nothing. The rock flows with water. The heart is dissolved in tenderness. The eyes are melted into tears. All this is God's work!

I have said already that God works through us, but still it is God's immediate work to send down the rain of His Grace from on high. Perhaps He is at work upon some of you though as yet there is no growth of spiritual life in your souls. Though your condition is still a sad one, we will hope for you that before long there shall be seen the living seed of Divine Grace sending up its tender green shoot above the soil—and may the Lord bless its growth!

II. In the second place, let us deliver A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE GROWTH. After the operations of the Holy Spirit have been quietly going on for a certain season as pleases the great Master and Husbandman, then there are signs of Grace. Remember the Apostle's words, "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." Some of our friends are greatly disturbed because they cannot see the full corn in the ear in themselves. They suppose that if they were the subjects of a Divine work they would be precisely like certain advanced Christians with whom it is their privilege to commune, or of whom they may have read in biographies.

Beloved, this is a very great mistake! When Grace first enters the heart it is not a great tree covering with its shadow whole acres—but it is the least of all seeds—like a grain of mustard seed. When it first rises upon the soul, it is not the sun shining at high noon—it is the first dim ray of dawn. Are you so simple as to expect the harvest before you have passed through the growing season? I shall hope that by a very brief description of the earliest stage of Christian experience you may be led to say, "I have gone as far as that," and then I hope you may be able to take the comfort of the text to yourselves: "You bless its growth."

What, then, is the growth of piety in the heart? We think it is first seen in sincerely earnest desires after salvation. The man is not saved, in his own apprehension, but he longs to be. That which was once a matter of indifference is now a subject of intense concern. Once he despised Christians and thought them needlessly earnest. He thought religion a mere trifle and he looked upon the things of time and sense as the only substantial matters. But now how changed he is! He envies the meanest Christian and would change places with the poorest Believer if he might but be able to read his title clear to mansions in the skies!

Now worldly things have lost dominion over him and spiritual things are uppermost. Once with the unthinking many he cried, "Who will show us any good?" But now he cries, "Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon me." Once it was the corn and the wine to which he looked for comfort, but now he looks to God alone. His rock of refuge must be God, for he finds no comfort elsewhere. His holy desires, which he had years ago, were like smoke from the chimney, soon blown away. But now his longings are permanent, though not always operative to the same degree. At times these desires amount to a hunger and a thirsting after righteousness, and yet he is not satisfied with these desires, he wishes for a still more anxious longing after heavenly things.

These desires are among the first growth of Divine life in the soul. "The growth" shows itself next in prayer. It is now real prayer. Once it was the mocking of God with holy sounds unattended by the heart—but now, though the prayer is such that he would not like a human ear to hear him, yet God approves it—for it is the talking of a spirit to a Spirit, and not the muttering of lips to an unknown God. His prayers, perhaps, are not very long—they do not amount to more than this—"Oh!" "Ah!" "Would to God!" "Lord have mercy upon me, a sinner!" and such-like short ejaculations, but, then, by God's Grace, they are prayers.

"Behold he prays," does not refer to a long prayer. It is quite as sure a proof of spiritual life within if it only refers to a sigh or to a tear. These "groans that cannot be uttered," are among "the growth." There will also be manifest a hearty love for the means of Grace, and the House of God. The Bible, long unread, which was thought to be of little more use than an old almanac, is now treated with great consideration. And though the reader finds little in it that comforts him just now, and much that alarms him, yet he feels that it is the book for him and he turns to its pages with hope.

When he goes up to God's House he listens eagerly, hoping that there may be a message for him. Before, he attended worship as a sort of pious necessity incumbent upon all respectable people. But now he goes up to God's House that he may find the Savior. Once there was no more religion in him than in the door which turns upon its hinges. But now he enters praying, "Lord, meet with my soul." And if he gets no blessing, he goes away sighing, "O that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat."

This is one of the blessed signs of "its growth." Yet more cheering is another, namely, that the soul in this state has faith in Jesus Christ, at least in some degree! It is not a faith which brings great joy and peace, but still it is a faith which keeps the heart from despair and prevents its sinking under a sense of sin. I have known the time when I do not believe any man living could see faith in me, and when I could scarcely perceive any in myself, and yet I was bold to say, with Peter, "Lord, You know all thing, You know that I love You."

What man cannot see, Christ can see. Many people have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ but they are so much engaged in looking at it that they do not see it. If they would look to Christ and not to their own faith, they would not only see Christ but see their own faith, too. But they try to measure their faith and it seems so little when they contrast it with the faith of full-grown Christians that they fear it is not faith at all. Oh, little one, if you have faith enough to receive Christ, remember the promise, "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God."

Poor simple, weak-hearted, and troubled ones, look to Jesus and answer, Can such a Savior suffer in vain? Can such an Atonement be offered in vain? Can you trust Him and yet be cast away? It cannot be! It never was in the Savior's heart to shake off one that did cling to His arm. However feeble the faith, He blesses "its growth." The difficulty arises partly from misapprehension and partly from lack of confidence in God.

I say misapprehension—now if like some Londoners you have never seen corn when it is green, you would cry out, "What? Do you say that yonder green stuff is wheat?" "Yes," the farmer says, "that is wheat." You look at it again and you reply, "Why, man alive, that is nothing but grass! You do not mean to tell me that this grassy stuff will ever produce a loaf of bread such as I see in the baker's window—I cannot conceive it." No, you could not conceive it, but when you get accustomed to it, it is not at all amazing to see the wheat go through certain stages. First the blade, then the ear, and afterwards the full corn in the ear.

Some of you have never seen growing Grace and do not know anything about it. When you are newly converted you meet with Christians who are like ripe golden ears, and you say, "I am not like they are." True, you are no more like they than that grassy stuff in the furrows is like full-grown wheat! But you will grow to be like they are one of these days. You must expect to go through the blade period before you get to the ear period! And in the ear period you will have doubts whether you will ever come to the full corn in the ear—but you will arrive at perfection in due time. Thank God that you are in Christ at all!

Whether I have much faith or little faith. Whether I can do much for Christ or little for Christ is not the first question. I am saved, not on account of what I am, but on account of what Jesus Christ is! And if I am trusting Him, however little in Israel I may be, I am as safe as the brightest of the saints.

I have said, however, that mixed with misapprehension there is a great deal of unbelief. I cannot put it all down to an ignorance that may be forgiven, for there is sinful unbelief, too. O Sinner, why do you not trust Jesus Christ? Poor quickened, awakened Conscience—God gives you His word that He who trusts in Christ is not condemned—and yet you are afraid that you are condemned! This is to call God a liar! Be ashamed and confounded that you should ever have been guilty of doubting the veracity of God!

All your other sins do not grieve Christ so much as the sin of thinking that He is unwilling to forgive you, or the sin of suspecting that if you trust Him He will cast you away! Do not slander His gracious Character. Do not cast a slur upon the generosity of His tender heart. He said, "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." Come in the faith of His promise and He will receive you right now! I have thus given some description of "its growth."

III. Thirdly, according to the text, THERE IS ONE WHO SEES THIS GROWTH. You, Lord—You bless its growth. I wish that some of us had quicker eyes to see the beginning of Grace in the souls of men. For lack of this we let slip many opportunities of helping the weaklings. If a woman had the charge of a number of children that were not her own, I do not suppose she would notice all the incipient stages of disease. But when a mother nurses her own dear children, as soon as ever upon the cheek or in the eye there is a token of approaching sickness, she perceives it at once.

I wish we had just as quick an eye, just as tender a heart towards precious souls. I do not doubt that many young people are weeks and even months in distress, who need not be, if you who know the Lord were a little more watchful to help them in the time of their sorrow. Shepherds are up all night at lambing time to catch up the lambs, as soon as they are born, and take them in and nurse them. And we, who ought to be shepherds for God, should be looking out for all the lambs, especially at seasons when there are many born into God's great fold—for tender nursing is wanted in the first stages of the new life.

God, however, when His servants do not see "its growth," sees it all. Now, you silent, retired spirits who dare not speak to father or mother, or brother or sister—this text ought to be a sweet morsel to you. "You bless its growth," which proves that God sees you and your newborn Grace. The Lord sees the first sign of penitence. Though you only say to yourself, "I will arise, and go to my Father," your Father hears you. Though it is nothing but a desire, your Father registers it. "You put my tears into Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?" He is watching your return. He runs to meet you and puts His arms about you, and kisses you with the kisses of His accepting love!

O Soul, be encouraged with that thought that up in the chamber or down by the hedge, or wherever it is that you have sought secrecy, God is there! Dwell on the thought, "You, God, see me." That is a precious text—"All my desire is before You." And here is another sweet one, "The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear Him, in them that hope in His mercy." He can see you when you only hope in His mercy, and He takes pleasure in you if you have only begun to fear Him!

Here is a third choice word, "You will perfect that which concerns me." Have you a concern about these things? Is it a matter of soul-concern with you to be reconciled to God and to have an interest in Jesus' precious blood? It is only "its growth," but He blesses it! It is written, "A bruised reed He will not break, and the smoking flax He will not quench, till He brings forth judgment unto victory." There shall be victory for you, even before the Judgment Seat of God, though as yet you are only like the flax that smokes and gives no light, or like the reed that is broken and yields no music! God sees the first growth of Grace.

IV. A few words upon a fourth point: WHAT A MISERY IT WOULD BE IF IT WERE POSSIBLE TO HAVE THIS GROWTH WITHOUT GOD'S BLESSING! The text says, "You bless its growth." We must, just a moment, by way of contrast, think of how the growth would have been without the blessing. Suppose we were to see a revival among us without God's blessing? It is my conviction that there are revivals which are not of God at all, but are produced by excitement.

If there is no blessing from the Lord it will be all a delusion, a bubble blown up into the air for a moment and then gone to nothing. We shall only see the people stirred to become the more dull and dead afterwards. And this is a great mischief to the Church. In the individual heart, if there should be growth without God's blessing, there would be no good in it. Suppose you have good desires, but no blessing on these desires? They will only tantalize and worry you, and then, after a time, they will be gone and you will be more impervious than you were before to religious convictions. If religious desires are not of God's sending, but are caused by excitement, they will probably prevent your giving a serious hearing to the Word of God in times to come.

If convictions do not soften they will certainly harden. To what extremities have some been driven who have had growth of a certain sort which has not led them to Christ! Some have been crushed by despair. They tell us that religion crowds the madhouse—it is not true—but there is no doubt whatever that religiousness of a certain kind has driven many a man out of his mind. The poor souls have felt their wound but have not seen the balm. They have not known Jesus. They have had a sense of sin and nothing more. They have not fled for refuge to the hope which God has set before them.

Marvel not if men go mad when they refuse the Savior! It may come as a judicial visitation of God upon those men who, when in great distress of mind, will not fly to Christ. I believe it is like this with some—you must either fly to Jesus or else your burden will become

heavier and heavier until your spirit will utterly fail. This is not the fault of religion—it is the fault of those who will not accept the remedy which religion presents. A growth of desires without God's blessing would be an awful thing, but we thank Him that we are not left in such a case.

V. And now I have to dwell upon THE COMFORTING THOUGHT THAT GOD DOES BLESS "THE GROWTH." I wish to deal with you who are tender and troubled. I want to show that God does bless your growth. He does it in many ways. Frequently He does it by the cordials which He brings. You have a few very sweet moments, but you cannot say that you are Christ's. At times the bells of your heart ring very sweetly at the mention of His name.

The means of Grace are very precious to you. When you gather to the Lord's worship you feel a holy calm and you go away from the service wishing that there were seven Sundays in the week instead of one. By the blessing of God the Word has just suited your case as if the Lord had sent His servants on purpose to you. You lay aside your crutches for awhile and you begin to run. Though these things have been sadly transient, they are tokens for good.

On the other hand, if you have had none of these comforts, or few of them, and the means of Grace have not been consolations to you, I want you to look upon that as a blessing! It may be the greatest blessing that God can give us to take away all comforts on the road, in order to quicken our running towards the end. When a man is flying to the City of Refuge to be protected from the man-slayer, it may be an act of great consideration to stop him for a moment that he may quench his thirst and run more swiftly afterwards. But perhaps, in a case of imminent peril, it may be the kindest thing neither to give him anything to eat or to drink, nor invite him to stop for a moment—in order that he may fly with undiminished speed to the place of safety.

The Lord may be blessing you in the uneasiness which you feel. Inasmuch as you cannot say that you are in Christ, it may be the greatest blessing which Heaven can give to take away every other blessing from you in order that you may be compelled to fly to the Lord. You, perhaps, have a little of your self-righteousness left, and while it is so you cannot get joy and comfort. The royal robe which Jesus gives will never shine brilliantly upon us till every rag of our own goodness is gone. Perhaps you are not empty enough, and God will never fill you with Christ till you are. Fear often drives men to faith.

Have you ever heard of a person walking in the fields into whose bosom a bird has flown because pursued by the hawk? Poor timid thing, it would not have ventured there had not a greater fear compelled it! All this may be so with you. Your fears may be sent to drive you more swiftly and more closely to the Savior, and if so, I see in these present sorrows the signs that God is blessing "its growth." In looking back upon my own "growth" I sometimes think God blessed me then in a lovelier way than now. Though I would not willingly return

to that early stage of my spiritual life, yet there were many joys about it. An apple tree when loaded with apples is a very comely sight. But give me, for beauty, the apple tree in bloom. The whole world does not present a more lovely sight than an apple blossom!

Now, a full-grown Christian laden with fruit is a comely sight, but still there is a peculiar loveliness about the young Christian. Let me tell you what that blessedness is. You now probably have a greater horror of sin than professors who have known the Lord for years! They might wish that they felt your tenderness of conscience. You have now a graver sense of duty and a more solemn fear of the neglect of it than some who are further advanced. You have also a greater zeal than many—you are now doing your first works for God, and burning with your first love—nothing is too hot or too heavy for you! I pray that you may never decline, but always advance!

And now to close. I think there are three lessons for us to learn. First, let older saints be very gentle and kind to young Believers. God blesses their growth—mind that you do the same. Do not throw cold water upon young desires. Do not snuff out young Believers with hard questions. While they are babes and need the milk of the Word, do not be choking them with your strong meat—they will eat strong meat by-and-bye, but not just yet. Remember, Jacob would not overdrive the lambs. Be equally prudent. Teach and instruct them, but let it be with gentleness and tenderness—not as their superiors, but as nursing fathers for Christ's sake. God, you see, blesses their growth—may He bless it through you!

The next thing I have to say is, fulfill the duty of gratitude. Beloved, if God blesses its growth we ought to be grateful for a little Grace. If you have only seen the first shoot peeping up through the mold, be thankful. And as you see the green blade waving in the breeze, be thankful for the ankle-deep verdure and you shall soon see the commencement of the ear! Be thankful for the first green ears and you shall see the flowering of the wheat, and by-and-by its ripening, and the joyous harvest.

The last lesson is one of encouragement. If God blesses "its growth," dear Beginners, what will He not do for you in after days? If He gives you such a meal when you break your fast, what dainties will be on your table when He says to you, "Come and dine"? And what a banquet will He furnish at the supper of the Lamb! O troubled One! Let the storms which howl, and the snows which fall, and the wintry blasts that nip your growth all be forgotten in this one consoling thought—God blesses your growth, and whom God blesses none can curse! Over your head, dear, desiring, pleading, languishing Soul, the Lord of Heaven and earth pronounces the blessing of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Take that blessing and rejoice in it evermore. Amen.