

FROST AND THAW

NO. 670

A SERMON
 DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JANUARY 14, 1866
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes.
 He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold?
 He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causes his wind to blow, and the waters flow.”
 Psalm 147:16-18*

MOST of us were astonished when looking out of our window the other morning we saw the whole earth robed in a white mantle. In a few short hours the earth had been covered to a considerable depth with snow. We were not much less astonished when looking forth again we saw the fields as green as ever, the trees all un-silvered, and the ploughed fields as bare as if no single flake had fallen. We do not often witness so heavy a descent of snow followed by so rapid a thaw.

These interesting changes were wrought by heaven, not only with a purpose toward the outward world, but we think with some design toward the realm which is inner and spiritual. 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.

The mind aspiring after knowledge finds pleasure in every phenomenon of nature. The naturalist is not abroad a single hour without hearing the voice of wisdom revealing natural things. But when a renewed mind is worshipping in nature's temple, then the spirit finds a secret wrapped up in the innermost folds of God's works.

Happy are those spirits who know how to get at the inward through the outward, and to find food for their heaven-born spirits, as well as for their mental powers, in the doings of the Lord in the works of His hand.

I shall ask your attention this morning, first, *to the operations of nature spoken of in the text*, And secondly, *to those operations of grace of which they are the most fitting symbols*.

I. Consider first, THE OPERATIONS OF NATURE THEMSELVES.

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 under our notice. 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 *giveth snow*,” as if every flake came directly from the palm of His hand, wherein it had been hidden as in a treasury.

We are not told that certain providential regulations form moisture into hoarfrost, no, but as Moses took ashes and scattered them upon Egypt, so “HE *scattereth the hoarfrost 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 *casteth forth his ice like morsels*.” Even as the slinger distinctly sends the stone out of his own sling, so the path of every hailstone is marked by the divine wisdom, and it derives its impetus from the divine power.

The ice is called, you observe, *His* ice, and then in the next sentence we read of *His* cold. If I can read your thoughts, you feel with me, that these words make nature strangely magnificent. When we can look upon every hailstone as God's hail, and upon every floating fragment of ice as His ice, how precious the watery diamonds become! When we feel the cold nipping our limbs and penetrating

through every garment, it somewhat consoles us, and makes us willing to endure its hardness when we remember that it is *His* cold.

When the thaw comes, see how the text speaks of it—“*He sendeth out his word.*” He does not leave it to supposed independent forces of nature, but like a king, “*He sendeth out his word and melteth them: he causeth 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, my brethren, how in God’s temple everything speaketh of His glory.

It has been very properly observed that the old Puritans saw God in everything, and cared, perhaps, too little about natural laws. If it rained they said, “The Lord unstops the bottles of heaven,” if it did not rain, they said, “He restrains the clouds that they refresh not the earth with showers.” They were accustomed to pray about everything, and see God’s hand distinctly and directly in every operation. But now one effect of our increased wisdom is the discovery that God is farther away than our forefathers thought.

A great iron wall of material forces is set up by certain philosophers between us and the great all-working JEHOVAH. We hear little about Him, but very much of the laws of nature. We take the thermometer and say, “Oh, the temperature fell so many degrees, and it was natural that the mist should become snow or that instead of dew there should be hoarfrost.”

We talk nowadays as if we were living in a world of machinery—as if the Lord had gone away and left the wheels of nature to go on working till the weights run down, or the great pendulum of time shall stop. But I hope every Christian heart revolts from such a view of the world as this. I had sooner be a child again, and be near to God, than be a philosopher, and with my philosophy only put God farther off.

It seems to me, I say again, to make the world so magnificent, to light it up with such a luster and such a splendor, to think that God is in it, and that it is *His* ice, and *His* snow, and *His* wind, and *His* cold, and that everything is His, since He is the Head of the House and Father of the Family.

With such views I feel, as far as I can be in this world, at home like a child in his own father’s house. And the prayer “Our Father, which art in heaven” seems to be a fitting and proper prayer for a denizen of a world where God is present still.

This thought of the directness of the divine operations in nature must be carried into providence. It will greatly comfort you if you can see God’s hand in your losses and in your crosses. You will be nerved to bear them patiently, for surely you will scarcely dare to murmur against the direct agency of your God.

This will put an extraordinary sweetness into your daily mercies. This will make the comforts of life more comfortable still, because they are from a Father’s hand. And if your table be 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 Him 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 shipwreck has dashed our bark upon the rock. See Him when we ourselves are stretched in sickness 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, 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 stalk through the land, ye say the Lord hath done it—
Hath He not done it when an aphis creeps upon the rosebud?
If an avalanche tumbles from its Alp, ye 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 the world. A man puts his hand into a wool-pack and throws out the wool. God gives snow as easily as that. “He giveth snow like wool.” A man stands upon a heap of ashes, takes up a handful, throws them into the air, and they fall around. “He scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes”—just as easily. There are wondrous marvels of nature in ice and snow. Those who have looked at the crystals, and examined their marvelous beauty, must have been astonished at the inimitable skill displayed in them. “He casteth forth his ice like morsels”—just as easily as we cast crumbs of bread outside the window to the robins during these wintry days.

When the rivers are hard frozen, and the earth held in iron chains, then the melting of the whole—how is that done? Not by lighting innumerable fires or the sending electric shocks from huge batteries through the interior of the earth—no, He sendeth forth His word and melteth them; He causeth His wind to blow, and the waters flow.”

The whole matter is accomplished with a word and a breath. See the magnificent ease with which God accomplishes all His purposes in nature! If you and I have any great thing to do, what puffing and panting, what straining and tugging there must be. And even the great engineers, who perform great things by machinery, must make much noise and stir about it. It is not so with the Almighty One.

Here is this our world spinning round every day in four-and-twenty hours, and yet it does not make so much noise as a humming top, and yonder ponderous worlds rolling in space in silence track their way. If I enter a factory I hear a deafening din, or if I stand near the village mill, turned by water dropping over a wheel, there is a never ceasing click-clack and an undying hum. But God’s great wheels revolve without noise or friction. All the divine work is simply, easily, and beautifully managed.

Let us observe this in providence as well as in nature. You will find your heavenly Father just as able to deliver you as He is to melt the snow, and He will deliver you in just as simple a way if you will rest upon Him. He will work on your behalf with as little noise, with as little appearance of effort, as He does in nature. Mark the ease of God’s works and be glad.

3. I shall invite you to 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 produces snow, and that is, we have already said, a most wonderful piece of workmanship, every crystal being a marvel of art which could not be equaled by the most skillful microscopic artist. But then He is not content with snow—from the same water He creates another form of beauty which we call hoarfrost, and yet a third lustrous sparkling substance, namely glittering ice, and all these by the same agency of cold. What a marvelous variety the educated eye can detect in these three forms of frozen water!

Then the same God who solidified the flood with cold soon melts it with warmth, opening by the same key with which He closed. 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 plain. At another time by slow degrees, in scanty dribbles, the drops regain their freedom.

Just the same variety you will find in every department of nature. And so in providence the Lord has a thousand forms of frosty trials with which to try His people, but He has ten thousand mercies with which to cheer and comfort them. He can afflict you with the snow-trial, or with the hoarfrost trial, or with the ice-trial if He will. And anon He can with His word relax the bonds of adversity which hold you so fast, and that in ten thousand ways.

Remember that Omnipotence has servants everywhere, and whereas men are tied to two or three plans and methods in accomplishing their will, God is infinite in understanding, and works as He wills by ways unguessed of mortal mind.

4. I shall not weary you if I 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, when letters were sent out by post upon swift dromedaries—it was a new invention when one man upon a dromedary travelled till the animal’s speed began to fail and then passed the mail bags to the next messenger who, similarly mounted, bore them onward in hot haste.

In our country we thought we had arrived at the age of miracles when the axles of stage coaches glowed with speed, but now that the telegraph is at work we dream of stretching out our hands into infinity. But what is all the rapidity of anything we can ever attain to compared with the rapidity of God's operations? Well does the text say, "He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runs very swiftly." Out went the word, "Open the treasures of snow," and they were opened, and the flakes descended in innumerable multitudes. And then it was said, "Let them be closed," and not another snowflake descended. Then spoke the Master, "Let the south wind blow and the snow be melted," and it was gone—it had disappeared at the voice of His word.

Oh, believer, you cannot tell how soon God may come to your help. "He rode upon a cherub and did fly," says David, "yea, 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 tremendous speed will He descend, that He will not stay to draw the curtains of heaven, but He will rend them and come through in 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 do these marvels so speedily can take to Himself the same wings of swiftness and come to your deliverance. Arise, O God! and let Thy children be helped, and that right early.

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 could not help thinking of the poor this week—one must have had a very hard heart not to do so—when you saw the snow lying so deep. But suppose that snow continued to fall! What is there to hinder it? The same God who makes snow one day could make it 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 sends us not "His cold" to such an extent that our spirits expire. The travelers towards the North Pole have often felt themselves tremble as they thought of this text, "Who can stand before his cold?" For the agency of cold has a degree of omnipotence in it when God is pleased to let it loose.

*"When from His dreadful stores on high
He pours the rattling hail,
The wretch that dares this God defy
Shall find his courage fail."*

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 giveth snow *like wool*." What, like warm wool? Yes, 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 frost. Hence Watts sings, in his version of the 147th 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, and gave it fertility, so that they praised God for it. However that may or may not be, certainly there is much mercy in the frost itself, doubtless pestilence might run a far longer race if it were not that the frost cries to it, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther."

Noxious insects would multiply until they devoured the precious fruits of the earth, if sharp nights did not destroy tens of millions of them, so that these pests are swept from off the earth. Though man may think himself a loser by the frost, he is a great ultimate gainer by the decree of providence which ordains winter. There is mercy—*mercy* in the frost.

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 helps towards fruitfulness, and so the ice becomes bread, and those agencies which, on a small scale, deprive our workers of the present 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, be you reminded of the goodness of God in the frost of adversity, which you feel this morning. Your losses and burdens are but God’s love dressed in black robes. 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 with the soft south wind of joy.

Endeavor to see the lovingkindness of God in every work of His hand! Praise Him—He maketh summer and winter—let your song go round the year! Praise Him—He giveth day and sendeth night—give Him songs in the night! Despond not, for God is with you, and rejoice evermore in Him. Cast not away your confidence, it shall have 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—

*“I will praise thee every day,
For thine anger’s passed away.”*

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

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, and even to feel it but for a season would congeal the marrow of one’s bones and make one’s whole being stiff with fright.

“Who can stand before his cold?” When the law comes forth blustering 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 thundering through the soul, music and dancing lose their joy, the bowl forgets all its power to cheer, and the enchantments of earth are broken.

None can deliver those whom God shuts up. When He shuts up in black despair, who can uplift the heavy bar? The rivers of pleasure freeze to icy despondency. The buds of hope which are plentiful, with young spirits especially, are suddenly nipped, and the soul finds no comfort in any earthly prospect. It was satisfied once to grow rich, but rust and canker are now upon all gold and silver. The man was content once to grovel with the world’s swine, but now his belly cannot be filled with husks. Every promising hope is nipped, 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 with him, and think his rags right royal robes, but now the cold frost finds out every rent in his garment, 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. He thought himself clean in the inward parts, but now the terrible knife of the law pierces to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, till he sees his secret parts to be filled with corruption and rotteness. These are some of the terrors of the frosty law of God.

All the while however, this frost of law and terrors does but 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.

The ploughshare would be broken that should 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 after my lusts will I go. Whereas there is no heaven for me after this life, I will make a heaven out of this earth, and if hell awaits me, I will at least drink in such poor sweets as sin may afford me here.” Still, though the law appears to do this, it is not the fault of the law, the blame lies with the corrupt heart which is hardened by it, yet nevertheless, such is its effect.

When the Lord has wrought by the frost of the law, He sends the thaw of the Gospel, and when the south wind blows from the quarter called “promise” bringing precious remembrances of God’s fatherly pity and tender lovingkindness, then straightway the heart begins to soften, and a sense of blood-bought pardon soon dissolves the heart of stone. The eyes fill with tears, the heart dissolves in tenderness, rivers of pleasure flow freely and buds of hope open in the cheerful air.

A heavenly spring beckons to the flowers that were sleeping in the cold earth, they hear His 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, His comfortable Word, “I have blotted out like a cloud thine iniquity, and like a thick cloud thy sins,” and when that blessedly cheering word comes with power to the soul, and the sweet breath of the Holy Spirit like the warm south wind blows, then the waters flow and the mind is filled with holy joy, and light, and liberty, for God is there.

*“The legal wintry state is gone,
The frosts are fled, the spring comes on,
The sacred turtle-dove we hear
Proclaim 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*.

Whenever there is a heart truly affected by the law of God, when sin is made to appear exceedingly sinful, when false carnal hopes are nipped 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 it as the finger of the minister. It was well that he preached earnestly—God has used him as an instrument, but God works all.

Let us not forget that the awakenings of conscience and the tremblings of the penitent soul are as distinctly the work of the divine hand, as the making of the stars that stud the night. When the thaw of 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 bindeth up the broken in heart and heals all their wounds. We are so very 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, salvation is not here.”

Some of you look to the preaching of the Word, and look no higher, but all true preachers will tell you, “These things are not in us, These are no work of ours.” Eloquence and earnestness at the very highest pitch can neither break nor heal a soul. This is God’s work. Ay, and not God’s second-hand work in the sense in which the philosopher admits that God is in the laws of nature, but God’s distinct work—His direct work. He puts His own hand to the work when the conscience is humbled, and it is by His own right hand when the conscience is eased and cleansed.

The reason why I desire that this thought may abide upon your minds is this—you will not praise God else, nor will you be sound in doctrine. I believe that all departures from sound doctrine on the point of God’s work of grace in the soul, arise from forgetfulness that it is the 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 to die for

us, and that our whole spiritual history through from the Alpha to the Omega, it must be the power of the Holy Spirit working 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 sending His wind, and snow, and 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 blessing and praising the wonder-working God, who doeth all things according to the counsel of His will.

*“Our seeking Thy face
Was all of Thy grace,
Thy mercy demands, and shall have all the praise:
No sinner can be
Beforehand with Thee,
Thy grace is preventing, almighty, and free.”*

2. The second thought upon nature was the *ease* with which the Lord worked. There was no noise, no stir. Transfer that to the work of grace. How easy it is for God to send law-work into the soul. Yes, in every case it is easy. Yon stubborn sinner, *you* cannot touch him—mere providence has failed to awaken him. He is dead—altogether dead in trespasses and sins.

But if the Lord sends His mighty word, if the glorious Lord does but bid the wind of His Spirit blow—there is no difficulty. Difficulty is not a word to be found in the dictionary of heaven. Nothing can be impossible with God. The swearing reprobate, whose mouth is blackened with profanity, whose heart is a very hell, and his life like the reeking flames of the bottomless pit—such a man, 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 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 for whom you have been praying until now, but of whose case you almost despair? Your husband may have many points which make his case desperate, but there are no desperate cases in heaven's pharmacy.

Your child may have offended both against heaven and against you, but God can save the most hardened. Your friend's character is a perfect wreck, and his soul is in as much jeopardy as yon poor mariner clinging to the mast which is borne upon the boiling surge. But as God can still the raging of the sea, so can He stay the fury of the wicked heart, and He can yet deliver the soul from death. Only cry unto Him. Hope on, hope ever, and you shall be surprised to find how easily God can conquer sin.

Why, any instrument may be blessed, any humble preacher may be the means of your friend's conversion, and whereas you have taken your friend to listen to this eminent man and to the other noted preacher, and all in vain, do not despair, your covenant God may have ordained to glorify Himself by means as yet unknown to you. He may convert your friend as He converted Simon Peter by the crowing of a cock, or speak to him as He did to Jonah by a worm.

With the preacher is the general rule of divine operation, but the King of grace can work without His servants if so it pleases Him. A sudden thought may strike your friend, and that shall suffice to humble pride and convince of sin. Ay, and that which seems as if it would drag him down to hell, may be made by God's grace the means of drawing him towards heaven when Omnipotence does but put forth its energy.

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. 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 gay verdure crown'd!

*“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
Thy soul-reviving ray;
This mental winter shall be spring,
This darkness cheerful day.”*

It is so easy for God to deliver you, so very simple a thing. “I have blotted out like a thick cloud thy iniquities.” How easily God blows away a cloud! 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 did but take a turn in the garden, and when I came back the sky was all blue—the wind had driven all the cloud away.

So may it be with your soul. It is an easy thing for the Lord to put away sin from repenting sinners. All difficulty was removed by Jesus on the tree—if you believe in Him you will find that the Savior has put your sins away by His death upon the cross. There are no difficulties left now in the salvation of sinners as far as God is concerned.

If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. If you can, poor sinner, at your worst, trust Christ Jesus and do Him the honor to believe that He can save the blackest sinner out of hell, you shall be saved. There is no if or but in it. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, you are born of God, and if you do trust yourself to Him you shall never perish, nor shall any pluck you out of his hand. Marvelous is the ease by which the once far off soul is brought nigh by the precious blood.

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, hoarfrost, ice, and when the thaw comes its ways are many. So is it with the work of God in the heart. All convictions are not the same. Some convictions fall, as the snow from heaven, like wool softly dropping. You never heard the snowflakes descend. They alight so gently one upon the other. Some convictions are just like that—soft-coming convictions. There they are, but exactly when they came we can scarcely tell. So you may experience the true work of repentance in your soul, but it may be of the very gentlest kind.

On the other hand, God has a way of working so that He casts forth His ice like morsels. The hailstones rattle against the window, and you think they will surely force their way into the room. So sometimes convictions come beating down till they remind you of hailstones and coals of fire. There is variety. Some of you dream that you cannot be saved because you do not feel the hailstones, but it is as true a frost which produces snow as that which brings forth hail.

Why should you want hailstones of terror? I was just about to say, “What a fool you are to desire legal terrors!” I will not say it, but I hope you will think so. Those of you who have felt the terrors of hell desired very anxiously to be rid of them, and here are actually some wishing for them.

If you ever tumble into the Slough of Despond, you will want to get out as quickly as possible, and will marvel that you should ever have wished to be lying in that foul and miry place. I would to God I could have found out the steps and gone through it without sinking into all those terrible, dread despondencies and fears.

Be thankful, dear friends, that God has visited you, but do not expect that He will work with you as He works with your neighbor. Let Him follow His own wise way, and be you still grateful for His goodness.

With regard to the Gospel thaw. If you get pardoned by Jesus, do not mind how you receive the boon. If you get to Jesus Christ, murmur not because you could not come in one particular way. Thaw is universal and gradual, but its commencement is not always discernible. The unloosing of the chains of winter is 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 it is universal and visible in its effects, it is very occult as to its cause.

You cannot see the mighty power which is doing all this, and so you must not expect to see 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 soul and producing the manifest effects of comfort, and hope, and peace. But you must not expect to see the Spirit who does it all. You can no more see the Spirit of God than you can see the south wind. He is invisible, the effect only is to be felt, and if you do feel it, do not marvel if it be somewhat different from what others describe.

After all there is a wonderful likeness in snow, and hoarfrost, and ice, and so is there a wonderful sameness in the experience of all God's children, but still there is a singular variety in all the works of God's grace.

4. We mentioned the *rapidity* of God's works. "His word runneth very swiftly." It did not take many days to get rid of the snow. If man had the doing of it I daresay he would have carted it away in due time, but he would have made long work of it. God sends forth His word, and it is done. So is it with the soul.

Some persons say they do not believe in instantaneous pardons. I believe in no others. Do not let me be misunderstood. *Every regeneration is really instantaneous.* Its evidences, its outward manifestations, may be gradual, but there must be a time when the man begins to live. There must be a period when the first ray of light darts upon the opened eye. There must be a time when the man is condemned, and a period when he is not condemned, and there must be an instant, and no more than an instant, when the change takes place. The quickening and justifying work of grace must from its very nature be instantaneous. God works rapidly.

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 God but does enable you to see the beauty of 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 put His arms down and lift you up, and set your feet upon a rock ere the clock shall have gone round the dial once more—in an instant from death to life—in an instant from condemnation to justification. "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise," was spoken to a dying thief, black and defiled with sin.

My Master's works are splendidly rapid—wait you upon him. You will not have to tarry. Your prayer shall go to heaven swift as a flash of lightning, and back again. Before you have concluded your prayer, before you have finished your supplication, the answer may come. Only believe you in the infinite mercy of God, manifested in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and if you can trust Him, "there is, therefore, *now* no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

5. The last thought upon the operation of God was *His goodness* in it all. What goodness there is negatively in the work of the law! 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. There are, no doubt, thousands who have been well-nigh driven to suicide when under the lash of a guilty conscience. Speak of a haunted man, no man need be haunted with a worse ghost than the remembrance of his old sins.

The old 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 do all that the old man could do and a great deal more. 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 under the weight of sin.

And 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 God were to permit it to have full work. Thank God, "He stayeth 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. We have enough mischief living in us still, but how much has that frost killed! The folly of self-righteousness was slain by the winter of conviction. We should be ten thousand times more proud, and lifted up, and foolish, and worldly, than we are, if it had not been for the blessed frost with which the Lord humbled our spirits.

Thank God it was a very sharp frost in my case. I would have thanked God if it had not been, but now I rejoice, for it enables me to enter experientially into the thoughts and feelings of those who are passing through the like. Thank God for the frost of conviction—thank Him it was not more severe.

But how shall we thank Him sufficiently for the thaw of His lovingkindness? Here let us wake up our recollections and sing anew the song of our espousals.

*"Dost mind the place, the spot of ground
Where Jesus did thee meet?"*

Do you remember that hour when first you saw the Lord? Oh blessed hour! It makes the water stand in our eyes to think of it. We saw One bleeding on a tree. He turned His gracious eyes upon us, and said to us, "Look!" and when we heard Him say, "I freely all forgive," the burden fell off our back and rolled into the sepulcher. We gave three great leaps for joy, and went on singing—

*"Blest cross, blest sepulcher—blessed rather be
The Man who there did shed His blood for me."*

That day saw a grand illumination in the town of Mansoul. All the flags were out, music abounded, and every church steeple rocked as the bells were made to ring. Every inhabitant was dressed in his best, while Prince Immanuel rode through our streets, which were strewed with the roses of our love, and the lilies of our consecration. What a feast of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined! Angels that day dwelt within our spirits, nay, better, the King Himself was there. We had come unto the mount of God, unto the blood of sprinkling, and to the banqueting house of Jesus' love.

Oh, happy day! Miriam's joy at the Red Sea, when she led forth the damsels, exclaiming, "Sing unto the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously!" was all outdone in our case. Our strain was more jubilant, our notes more full of joy, and our hearts more exulting when we sang, "He is my God, and I will extol him; he is my father's God, and I will exalt him." Praise you the Lord, my brethren, and my sisters, as you recollect that "He sent his word, and melted all our fears: he caused his wind to blow, and made the waters of your joy flow, and our soul was saved in him."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 147

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