This is a summary of a sermon (No. 999) delivered, July 9th, 1871, by the prince of preachers, C. H. SPURGEON. It was a two-hour sermon that I have melted down to two half-hour sermons to accommodate today’s sound-bite generation.

Isaiah 40:6-8

"A voice says, ‘Cry! And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’ All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. [7] The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. [8] The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”

This verse tells what God commands his preachers to shout. The Spirit of Christ that was in Isaiah is referring to the withering work when God breathes on sinners. (The Hebrew word for breath is the same word as Spirit.) It’s sometimes called, the “law work,” or “the work of humiliation,” or “the preparatory work” that precedes the new birth. Now look at how Peter applies Isaiah’s words to the new birth.

1 Peter 1:23-25

"having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, 24 because ‘All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, 25 But the word of the LORD endures forever.’ Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.”

Isaiah’s subject in chapter 40 is comfort. “Comfort my people, says your God.” He then goes on to foretell the coming of John the Baptist to prepare the
way for comfort by means of the withering work in verse 3, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord..." What kind of comfort was it for John the Baptist to say to the crowds, “Who warned you snakes?” “In order to make room for Christ and his salvation he had to wither man’s self confidence. Without that, there can be no comfort. Without striking there will be no stroking. God says, “I strike... and I heal.” Without striking there will be no healing. God says, “I kill and I make alive.” Without God killing the flesh, there can be no resurrection. Spurgeon and the Puritans called this work that confounds human pride, “the Holy Spirit’s preparatory work.” Only then can the glory of the Lord be revealed. Spurgeon says, “There is a withering wrought by the Spirit that prepares for conversion.”

4

The Main Application
...is your own personal histories— the experience of every child of God. In every one of us all that is of the flesh must be seen as grass. It has to be withered. Confidence in our own goodness has to go before we can be saved. The Spirit of God, like the wind, must cause our beauty to be like a fading flower. He convinces us of sin, and so reveals ourselves to ourselves until we finally see that the flesh profits nothing; till we finally see that our fallen nature is corruption itself, and that "they who are in the flesh cannot please God." Not until then can the incorruptible seed of the word of God be implanted by the Holy Spirit in our souls.

Spurgeon points out three aspects of the withering work.

6

I. THE WITHERING WORK IS UNEXPECTED
First, notice that the withering work is very unexpected. Isaiah said, "What shall I cry?" Like many modern preachers, even Isaiah did not know
he was supposed to do that. In order to comfort God's people, a preliminary visitation is needed. Modern preachers have forgotten Hell’s best kept secret. What’s that? The law is the schoolmaster to bring men to Christ. No wonder we see so much shallowness and false converts in modern Christians. Preachers are trying to comfort people who think themselves rich and increased in goods and have no need. Men will never accept Christ while they hold themselves in high esteem. Only the sick will welcome the physician. It is the work of the Spirit of God to convince men of sin, and until they are convinced of sin, they will never be led to seek the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Spurgeon says, “I am persuaded, that wherever there is a real work of grace in any soul, it begins with a humiliating withering: the Holy Spirit does not build on the old foundation. When every sandy foundation is gone, then, but not till then, will he lay in our souls the great foundation stone, chosen of God, and precious.”

7

It’s Also Unexpected By The Awakened Sinner
When the awakened sinner asks God to have mercy upon him, he’s astonished to find that, instead of enjoying a speedy peace, his soul is bowed down under a sense of divine wrath. It’s only natural for him to ask, "Is this the answer to my prayer? I prayed the Lord to deliver me from sin and self, and is this the way he deals with me? I said, 'Hear me,' and behold he wounds me with the wounds of a cruel one. I said, 'Clothe me,' and lo! He has torn off from me the few rags that covered me before, and my nakedness stares me in the face. I said, 'Wash me,' and behold he has plunged me in the ditch. Is this the way of grace?" Don’t be surprised: this is the way it is. Do you know why? You can’t be healed until the proud gangrene is cut out.
Even In God’s Children It Is Surprising

The convincing work of the Spirit is unexpected even to the child of God in whom this process still has to go on. We begin again to build what the Spirit of God had destroyed. Having begun in the spirit, we act as if we could take over now. John Newton wrote:

"I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith and love and every grace,
Might more of his salvation know,
And seek more earnestly his face.

Twas he who taught me thus to pray,
And he, I trust, has answered prayer;
But it has been in such a way
As almost drove me to despair.

I hop'd that in some favour'd hour,
At once he'd answer my request,
And by his love's constraining power
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, he made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart.
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in ev'ry part."

The voice that says, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people," can only achieve its purpose by first making them hear the cry, "All flesh is like grass... The grass withers, and the flower falls."

II. The Withering Work Is God’s Normal Order

It is according to the normal order of the divine operation. When the Lord creates us anew, he borrows nothing from the old man, but makes all
things new. He does not repair and add a new wing to the old house of our depraved nature, but he builds a new temple for his own praise. The old must go before the new can come.

III. The Withering Work Is Universal

Notice in our text how universal this process is in its range over the hearts of all those upon whom the Spirit works. The withering is a withering of what? Of part of the flesh and some portion of its tendencies? No, it says, "All flesh is grass; and all the goodliness thereof"—the very choice and pick of it—"is as the flower of the field," and what happens to the grass? Does any of it live? All of "The grass withers." All of it. The flower falls. So wherever the Spirit of God breathes on the soul of man, there is a withering of everything that is of the flesh, and makes us see that to be carnally minded is death. Of course, we all know and confess that where there is a work of grace, our delight in the pleasures of the flesh must be destroyed. When the Spirit of God breathes on us, that which was sweet becomes bitter; that which was bright becomes dim. A man cannot love sin and yet possess the life of God. If he takes pleasure in fleshly joys wherein he once delighted, he is still what he was.

But mark this. Wherever the Spirit of God blows, he destroys the goodliness and flower of the flesh; that is, our own righteousness withers. Before the Spirit comes we think we’re as good as the best.

Most people think they can turn to God whenever they want to. The resolutions of the flesh are nice flowers, but they must all fade. All flesh is as grass. The withering work of the Holy Spirit is universal. Every child of God will experience it. That which is of the flesh is flesh and that which is of the Spirit is Spirit.
When you feel withered, thank God. Comfort is coming. Weeping may last for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

12

"...been born again, not of corruptible seed...

because ‘All flesh is as grass
But the word of the LORD endures forever.’

Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.”

1 Peter 1:23-25
The Withering Work of the Spirit
Isaiah 40:6-8
Also called: The work of humiliation
And The work of preparation.
And the law work
1 Peter 1:23-25

“...been born again, not of corruptible seed...

because ‘All flesh is as grass

But the word of the LORD endures forever.’

Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.”
“Comfort my people, says your God.”
(Isaiah 40:1)

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord..."
(Isaiah 40:3)
The Main Application

Confidence in our own goodness has to go before we can be saved.
"What shall I cry?"
It’s Also Unexpected By The Awakened Sinner

"Is this the answer to my prayer?"
It Even Surprises God’s Children

Having begun in the spirit, we act as if we could take over now.
The Withering Work Is God’s Normal Order

When the Lord creates us anew, he borrows nothing from the old man, but makes all things new.
The Withering Work Is Universal

All of "The grass withers."
All of it.
“...been born again, not of corruptible seed... because ‘All flesh is as grass But the word of the LORD endures forever.’ Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.”

1 Peter 1:23-25
The Withering Work