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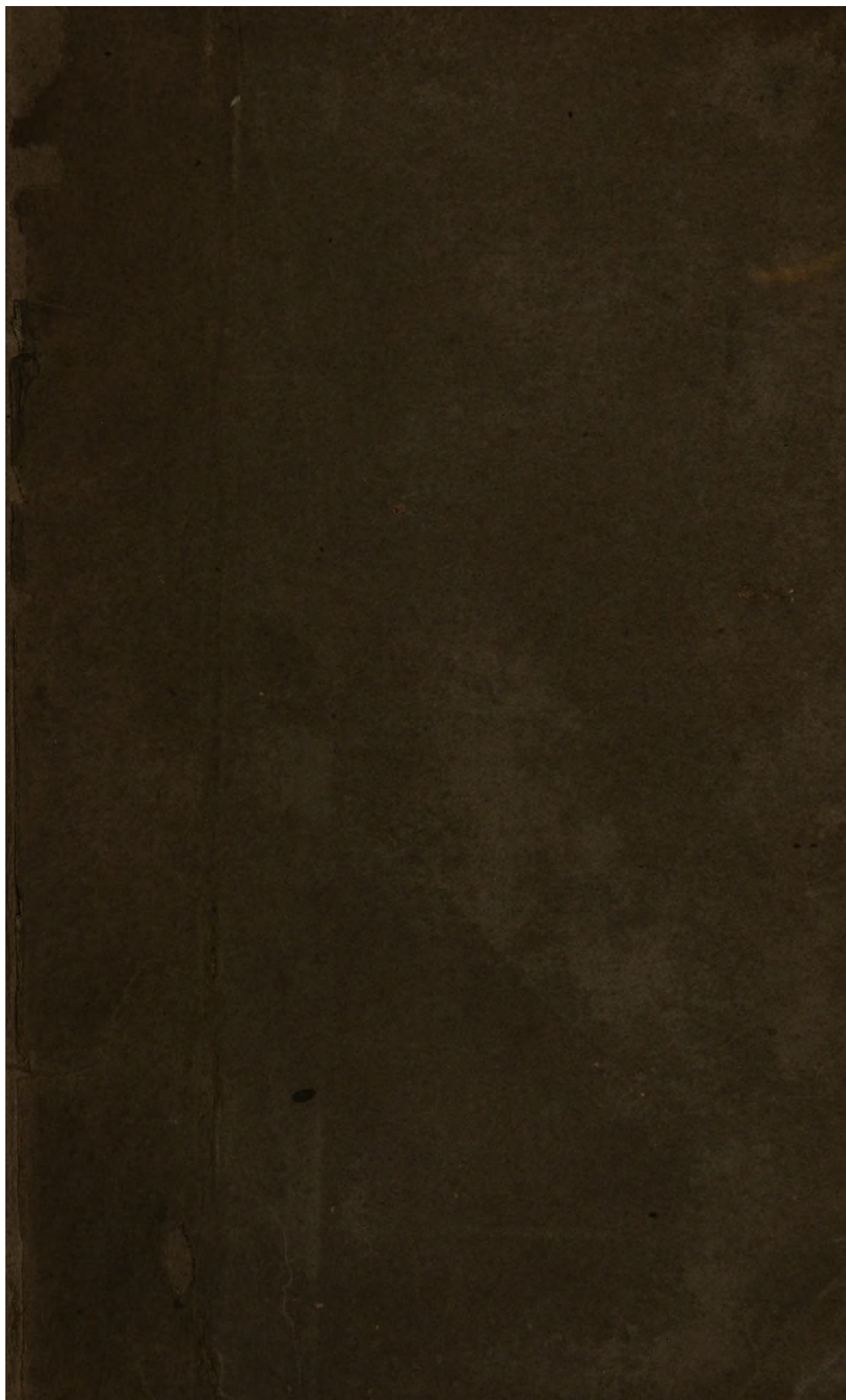
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W. A. Stantard
given by his friends
Charles Colver
1. Oct.^r
1831

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SERMONS,

PREACHED IN

ST. JAMES'S CHAPEL, CLAPHAM,

SURREY.

BY

THE REV. CHARLES BRADLEY,

VICAR OF GLASBURY, BRECKNOCKSHIRE; AND MINISTER OF
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TO
THE CONGREGATION
OF
ST. JAMES'S CHAPEL, CLAPHAM,

THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED,
IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF KINDNESS WHICH HE CAN
NEITHER RECOMPENSE NOR FORGET,
BY THEIR FRIEND AND MINISTER,
THE AUTHOR.

Clapham, Aug. 23, 1831.

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SERMON I.

THE PROMISE OF GOD TO THE ISRAELITES
AT SINAI.

EXODUS xx. 24.

*In all places where I record my name, I will come
unto thee, and I will bless thee.*

OUR greatest comforts are generally sent to us in our darkest hours. They come when we least expect them; in seasons of disquietude; at the very moment when we are sinking under the weight of present griefs, or fainting at the prospect of impending troubles.

Look at the Israelites. This chapter shews them to us assembled at the foot of Sinai in the wilderness. The tremendous scene of magnificence which they witnessed there, appalled their very souls. From a mountain blazing with lightnings and shaking with thunderings, they heard pro-

nounced by the lips of Jehovah himself, a law for their tribes; a law which was indeed in itself "holy, and just, and good," the law and the delight of heaven, but still a law which branded as guilty them and their doings, and which consequently they felt to be, in their case, a sentence of condemnation, a "ministration of death." Wondering and terrified, they entreated that the voice which proclaimed it, though it was the voice of their own God, might be heard no more. But amidst the fears within them, and the "blackness, and darkness, and tempest," that surrounded them, the very voice they would have silenced, tells them of a sacrifice for sin, and then declares in their ears this gracious promise, making perhaps the very declaration of it at this moment a partial confirmation of its truth, "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee."

Let our first subject of enquiry be the places referred to here; our second, the mercies we are warranted to expect in them.

I. The promise is evidently of universal application. Its language implies, or rather broadly asserts this. It speaks of all places, and consequently it takes in or may take in the whole world, and every spot in the world. It refers to this parish, as well as to the wilderness or

Canaan; it belongs as much to this congregation, as to that assembled at Sinai. No matter where, in divinely taught Judæa, or in Christian England, or in heathen India; amidst the sands of Africa or the snows of Greenland; in the dark places of earth or in the bright places of heaven; "In all places," says God, "where I record my name, I will come, and bless."

Where then can this glorious name be found? To answer this question, we must first ascertain what the Lord Jehovah intends us to understand by his recording it.

With us names mean little or nothing. They are, for the greater part, names and nothing more, answering the purpose of distinguishing one person or place from another, but beyond this, conveying no idea to the mind. In the early ages of society however, the case was different. Names were significant; they were more or less descriptive of the individuals to whom they were applied. Thus we find the dying Rachel calling the babe whose birth cost her her life, Benoni, the son of her sorrow; while his father, who looked on him as the future prop of his old age, called him Benjamin, the son of his right hand. And why was he who is so precious to our hearts, called Jesus? Because the word signifies a Saviour, and he came down from the heavens to be the great Saviour of the lost.

It is easy then to discover what we are to understand by the name of the Lord. His name is used in this passage for his character, his excellencies, his perfections. It comprehends his eternal self-existence, his uncontrollable sovereignty, his boundless power, his wonderful holiness, his fathomless wisdom, his unshaken truth, and, above all, his matchless, everlasting love. "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory," said Moses to him. The Lord granted his prayer, and this was the manner in which he answered it, "he proclaimed the name of the Lord." "The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin."

To "record" a name is first to proclaim or write it, and then to cause that writing to be preserved or that proclamation to be remembered. The Lord therefore records his name in a place, when he declares his perfections, makes himself known there; when he tells us what he is; unfolds to us his character, displays something of his holiness, and majesty, and grace; and keeps up this display; not flashing it for a moment before us, like a meteor in the air, but fixing it bright and glorious in our sight, like the sun in the heavens. Hence he speaks not only of "putting

his name," but "causing it to dwell, in the place that he shall choose."

Now comes the question, Where has the Holy One of Israel thus revealed himself? Where has he thus recorded his great name? Where, brethren, has he not recorded it? It is engraven on the face of universal nature. It shines in the sun, it glitters in the stars; the seas, and the mountains, and the woods, all bear its impress; it may be read on every blade of grass. If we go up into heaven, it is resplendent there in the glories and joys of that world of wonders; and if we go down into hell, the darkness cannot conceal, it displays rather than hides it.

But to none of these manifestations of himself, does the Lord refer us in this text. He alludes mainly to one peculiar mode of exhibiting his character, and that a plainer and more comprehensive developement of it, than all his other works combined could afford. Look at the promise. It stands connected with a passage that speaks of blood, and of blood shed as an expiation for sin. "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings and thy peace offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen;" and then it is added, "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee." Here therefore we obtain at last a distinct answer to our question. The name of the Lord is re-

corded wherever that great sacrifice for sin, which these offerings prefigured, is made known; and such a revelation of Jehovah himself is kept up, as harmonizes with this sacrifice. The cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is, in fact, the one great manifestation of a hidden God. In that scene of degradation and mystery, the last scene in which men would have looked for him, it pleased him to lay bare his greatness. He unveiled the treasures of his wisdom, holiness, and goodness; and bade an astonished world behold their extent and adore their glory. They had indeed been revealed before; men had seen something of them, and the hosts of heaven had for ages admired them; but they burst forth on the cross with a radiance that dazzled the angels as they gazed on it, and excited among them a wonder which has never yet ceased. Accustomed since the time of their creation to all the magnificence of their heavenly dwelling place, and familiar with all the scenes of splendour it contains, they yet desire to look into this exhibition of the Godhead, and see in it a vastness which they can never measure, a fulness they can never grasp. As for man, he can pour contempt on any thing; but no sooner are the eyes of his understanding enlightened, than in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, he beholds his God. It becomes at once the object of his study, the ground of his hope, the

theme of his praise. No language can describe his feelings as he contemplates it; they are feelings of unutterable admiration, and more than earthly delight; feelings that will go with him into heaven, and can only be expressed in its songs.

The whole tenor of scripture confirms this view of the text. It represents the blessed Jesus in his human nature, as an embodying of the divine perfections, "the image of the invisible God." "God," says Saint Paul, "was manifest in the flesh." "We preach Christ crucified," says he; and why? Because Christ crucified, he tells us, is "the power of God and the wisdom of God." "We preach not ourselves," he says again, "but Christ Jesus the Lord;" and if we ask a second time why he must be the one unceasing subject of his discourse, he gives us the second time the same answer; "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." "Lord, shew us the Father," cried Philip to the Saviour. Jesus said unto him, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father."

We may now turn to ourselves. If the incarnate, suffering, and crucified Son of God, is faith-

fully preached within these walls;* if the gospel that testifies of him, instead of being forgotten, or corrupted, or half explained away, is brought to you in its simplicity as a message from the skies; if man is described here as guilty, and condemned, and perishing, and the cross held out before him as his only refuge; then here has the Lord Jehovah recorded his name; here is one of those very places of which this scripture speaks; nay, here is a place which the God of Israel had specially in his mind when he uttered these words: amidst the terrors of Sinai, his eye was on it, as really and intently as it is on it now; he marked it for a blessing. He looked too through distant ages on you; he saw you amidst your oppressions, and fears, and sorrows; and you were the people whom he intended his voice to reach, whom he purposed to cheer and gladden, when he proclaimed in the wilderness, "I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee."

II. Let us go on to consider *his promise*.

1. It encourages us to expect in this house of prayer *the presence of God with us*. "I will come unto thee." And what more can we desire? The presence of an earthly friend, the mere sight of a fellow-worm who loves us, is refreshing to the

* This Sermon was preached shortly after the Consecration of the Chapel in which it was delivered.

heart; but the presence of God, O who can describe its power or its blessedness? It is rest to the soul; a something which not only quiets, and strengthens, and raises it, but leaves it nothing to wish for; and no wonder—it is a foretaste of heaven, of a satisfying heaven; it is the “fulness of joy;” no cistern of happiness, which a few moments or hours of enjoyment can empty, but a fountain of life, a spring that eternity cannot dry up nor a universe exhaust. How often, brethren, has it turned our heaviness into gladness, our prayers into praises, our weeping into songs! It would turn a wilderness into a paradise; and what would it make this place of prayer? “None other but the house of God and the gate of heaven.”

But, it may be asked, what do we mean by all this? Is not God every where present? and every where equally present? present in all the universe in all the fulness of his essence? He is; he must be. There is no confining, no limiting, of him. “The heaven is” his “throne, and the earth is” his “footstool.” He inhabits eternity, and he fills “the wide wastes of time.” All nature is his temple, and all space his abode. When therefore he says, “I will come unto thee,” we must understand him to mean that he will make his presence known to us; not only be with us, but let us see him to be with us; discover himself unto us; put this feeling into our hearts and almost

force it out of our lips, "The Lord is in this place. We have seen his glory." And how will he do this? He will bring that to pass, which no mortal power can accomplish; he will lay bare his arm of mercy, he will discover himself by the operations of his grace. Thus he explains his own meaning; "I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee;" "so bless thee, that my presence shall be known by the happiness I communicate, and the mercies I bestow."

2. We are warranted then to look for *blessings from heaven* in this place, and these real blessings, great blessings, mercies which God himself esteems blessings.

But here we must remember that any thing, in order to be a blessing, must be adapted to the situation and condition of those to whom it is given. That which is a solid good to one, bestowed on another, might become an evil, a curse. Hence when the Lord Jehovah says "I will bless thee," before we can understand his words, we must have some acquaintance with the character and circumstances of those to whom they are addressed. If spoken to an angel or a redeemed saint in heaven, they may mean one thing; addressed to this sinner on the earth, another thing; and sent home to the heart of that poor child of the dust, yet something different. We must look to ourselves then. We must ask where we are

standing and whither we are going; where we are and what we are. And to what a multitude of thoughts do such questions as these give rise! What wants, and burdens, and sins, and fears, do they bring before us! "Who am I? A creature finding myself in a world where nothing can satisfy me; so loving its dust, that I cannot disengage my heart from it, but yet restless, craving, angry; almost at times ready to curse the world I love for mocking and deceiving me. I am troubled too; so situated, that I cannot get away from affliction; and so weak, that I cannot stand against it; and so self-willed, that I know not how to bend down to it. Within too all is wrong. I am the slave of feelings I abhor, and of habits which, my reason tells me, I ought to detest. Whither am I going? I am going to the grave, and that is almost all I know; darkness lies beyond. The Bible tells me I am a sinner, and I am sure that the testimony is true, for my conscience tells me the same. I shall soon die, and I would go to some world of happiness, to heaven, when I die; but heaven is holy, and God is holy; and how can a sinner, how can my unclean soul, live there or get there? No; I am sinful, and, because I am sinful, I am lost, undone."

Is this your language, brethren? Then the Lord is already come to you; is already beginning to bless you. The first mercy he communi-

cates where he records his name, is a disclosure to us of the mournful secret of our own guilt and wretchedness. He begins his work of blessing by stripping the world of its mask, and the mind of its folly and delusion; by disquieting, and emptying, and humbling, the soul. And throughout our whole life, it is in his house as it is in his providence, he often blesses us the most when he pains us the most.

But he does not end with uncovering our misery; he lays open himself to us as an all sufficient remedy for every ill, a near, and boundless, and open supply for every want. And he does this by putting forth the energy of his Spirit, and making the exhibition of his own perfections in the person of his Son the means of enlightening, sanctifying, comforting, and saving us. He blesses where he records his name, by the very act of recording it. We find in Christ Jesus the God that we need; one so merciful, that he can blot out in a moment the iniquities of a life; so powerful, that he can subdue the most fondly cherished corruptions of the most polluted heart; so wise in his counsels, that he can glorify his justice while he raises the guilty to his favour; so rich in his goodness, that the vilest sinner that breathes, is welcome at his feet, and may take, freely as any angel in heaven, the treasures of his everlasting love; yea, he may take him

and all his infinite perfections for his own, and “be filled with all the fulness of God.”

And now, brethren, let us ask, What says this scripture to us? It suggests to us at once this reflection; *How much more ought we to expect in this house of prayer, than any of us perhaps have ever thought of expecting in it!*

“I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee,” said a faithful God on Sinai. And did the words, as they died on his lips, pass away from his remembrance? No; his church in the wilderness beheld and owned his presence. He shone forth between the cherubim; he met his people in his tabernacle, and “made them joyful in his house of prayer.” And when a temple was built at Jerusalem for his rest, he dwelt even visibly in it. “The glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord;” and this was his promise concerning it, “I have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice. Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attend unto the prayer that is made in this place. Mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.” And when he left the heaven of his glory, and came down “a man of sorrows” to the earth, was Sinai forgotten amidst his labours and griefs? A thousand years had not erased from his memory one word of the promise he had uttered there. He remembers it;

he takes it up as his own; he explains it; he confirms and extends it. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name," says he, "there am I in the midst of them." "In all places," was his language on the mountain: "Wheresoever any are gathered together," is his language now. "I will come unto thee," said he to the hosts of Israel: he says to us, "Where only two or three are met together, I am." "I will come," was his promise in the wilderness; but this is his declaration in his church, "I am come; there am I in the midst:" his presence is no longer a mercy to be hoped for, it is a blessing to be enjoyed. But all this, it may be said, was addressed to his chosen disciples; and was intended only for the early and persecuted ages of his church. He foresaw the objection. Hear him again; "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

What then is this house of prayer? It is a place where we are to meet our God. We see him not, perhaps we think not of his presence; but if only two or three of us are seeking our happiness in him, he is here, and he is here to bless us. His own faithful lips have told us so. May his Spirit grant that our own experience may often tell us the same!

We are living in a dreary world, brethren, and many a burden shall we have to bear in our pas-

sage through it, many a bitter tear to shed, and many a conflict to sustain; but this is the house of God, and we are as much warranted to expect consolation and strength in it, as health from our food or warmth from the sun. It is opened to us as a sanctuary from our cares and a refuge from our sorrows. We need nothing more in order to find it such, than a spirit in unison with its design; a seeking, expecting, thirsting heart. We have only to say with David, "My soul panteth for God; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God;" then shall we say also with him, and say it with joyful lips, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee."

And here arises another reflection. Do we really wish for these blessings? Do we desire to hold communion with heaven within these walls? Then *how earnest ought our supplications to be that the Lord Jehovah would continue to record here his great name!*

All depends on this. His blessing comes, only where the gospel that reveals him, comes. And by the gospel I mean, not a cold, comfortless Christianity, but those "good tidings of great joy," which constitute God's highest glory, earth's only hope, and heaven's loudest praise; the tidings of salvation, a free, complete, glorious salvation;

not waiting to be wrought out by our feeble arm, but accomplished already by the Lord Jesus Christ; the purchase of his blood, the reward of his sufferings, the gift of his grace. Without this, or with this corrupted, modified, obscured, of what avail to you or your children will this fabric be? I will not say, Better had no wall of it ever been raised; for the Bible will be read here, prayers breathing the spirit of the Bible must be heard here, and who will dare to say that God is absent? But still without a faithful steward of his mysteries, without a setting forth of the great sacrifice in any place, be that place what it may, we have no authority for saying that the name of the Lord will be known in it; we have no experience to warrant the hope that he will come there, or that a single spiritual blessing will be found. Bethel was his house; gloriously had he displayed in that favoured spot his love and goodness; but when the calves of Jeroboam were set up at Bethel, what did it become? A Bethaven, a house of iniquity; and the vengeance of heaven was on it. God abhorred his own temple also, when his name ceased to be honoured in it. "Let us depart," sounded through its courts, and the plough of the Roman conqueror went over it. And what stands now on its site? The mosque of a base impostor. And what are Corinth, and Ephesus, and Rome, and other places once ho-

noured by the presence and the blessings of Christ? Scenes of spiritual desolation and death. And what, a hundred years ago, was our own land? We had our Bibles and prayer-books, the same Bibles that instruct and the same prayer-books that guide us now, but the great doctrines of the cross, if not denied, were passed over in many of our pulpits; they were buried, and all the power of religion seemed buried with them. Christianity became a name, I might say, well nigh a corpse among us. And such it will become again, if the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is again forgotten. No matter what is substituted in its stead; it may be specious, and attractive, and exciting; it may seem to ascribe much glory and to bring much honour to the Saviour; but if his cross be not its main, its great subject, its foundation, its completion, its glory, its all in all, it is not the gospel which the apostles preached, it is not the gospel for which the martyrs bled, it is not the gospel which has filled heaven with praise, it is not the gospel which will save your souls; it is what is called in the verse following the text, "the lifting up of the tool of man upon the altar of God;" and the pollution will drive the name, and the presence, and the mercies of God, far away from us.

Prayer, brethren, fervent, unceasing prayer—let that sanctify this building; let that make and

keep it a house of praise. We have dedicated it to the once crucified, but now exalted Jesus. He is Lord of this house. In it, blessed be God! his name has been recorded. The first sermon ever heard in it, testified of him. O that the last sermon that will ever echo within its walls, may be full of the savour of his blessed name!

And may I not add one word more? If so much depends on the preaching of the cross, *how constant ought your prayers to be for those who preach it!*

God employs not angels, but men, in recording his name, and men involved in the same ruin, the same ignorance, as their fellow-sinners; men subject to the same temptations, carrying about the same burdens, labouring under the same infirmities, aching with the same sorrows. Through channels like these, will his glorious gospel come to you. And yet on the faithful exhibition of it, depends much of its power, and much of your blessedness; the peace perhaps of your own care-worn souls, the safety, the everlasting welfare, of your children. Shall I after this say, "Brethren, pray for us?" Cold indeed must be that heart which does not both pray and feel for the minister of Christ. And if there is one minister of Christ, who especially needs your prayers, it is he who now supplicates them. I need not tell you that I shall be with you in weakness, in

much weakness; but I heed not that. A mighty God can work here, as he works in a thousand other places, without the aid of human strength. My Bible tells me that he can take hold of a worm, and enable it to "thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and make the hills as chaff." I need, brethren, what you need, a heart to take my weakness to my God, and seek my strength in him. Of you I ask, beyond your prayers, your kind indulgence; and I know that I shall have it. Make me not an offender for a word, no, nor yet for many words. Bear with me, if I grieve; forgive, if I pain you. Yet a little while, and the voices of other ministers will be heard among you, and then a little longer and you yourselves will hear no minister at all. Of those who perhaps most wished to worship with us in this building, some are gone into eternity since its foundations were laid, and we ourselves shall soon be there, you, and I, and our children. We shall meet there. What will that meeting be? Thou God of mercy, make it a meeting in thine own blissful presence, the exchange of this house of prayer for thine own everlasting house of joy and praise.

SERMON II.

THE LOST SHEEP.

ST. LUKE XV. 4, 5, 6.

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.

THIS parable was spoken by our Lord in his own defence. His old enemies, the scribes and pharisees, had turned his condescension into a ground of attack on him. "This man," said they, "receiveth sinners." The charge was not repelled. With a silent dignity, the patient

Saviour admits its truth, passes over, as though unnoticed, the selfishness and pride it manifested, and stoops down at once to justify the compassion it condemned. He appeals to the ordinary conduct of the people who surrounded him, conduct approved and followed by these very murmurers, and finds in that a triumphant vindication of his own.

And in doing this, he does more than this. He turns his weapon of defence into an instrument of mercy, silencing these Jews by words of which they were not worthy; words evidently intended for men of another spirit and for another purpose; intended perhaps for some of you; designed to put hope, and adoration, and joy, into your hearts. They bring before us an object of peculiar need, and, at the same time, of peculiar care and mercy—a worthless sinner, recovered, saved, and carried joyfully to heaven, by the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. The parable represents, first, *his natural condition*. And what marvellous compassion breaks forth in the description given us of this! A veil is thrown over all that we might have expected to be most conspicuous in it. Not a word is said of man's criminality or man's pollution. The blessed Jesus appears to lose sight of both. He speaks as a father forgetting, in the

misery of his children, all their guilt. "Sinners," said the Jews. "No," said Christ, "lost sheep; poor, thoughtless wanderers from their home."

The figure conveys to us three ideas.

1. The first is *want*; not absolute want perhaps, not complete destitution; for the rocky mountain may yield some food, and the sandy desert some refreshment; but the sheep is away from the fold; it has consequently no satisfying, no adequate, no certain pasture; it lives, if it lives at all, in hunger, weariness, and suffering.

And what is our condition, brethren, when at a distance from God? It is worse than the condition of this lost sheep, more necessitous, more desolate. Regard us indeed as no better than machines of flesh and blood, creatures with no higher capacities of enjoyment than the brute beasts that perish, then there is enough for us, and more than enough, in this well stored world. But admit that "there is a spirit in man," view him as a being endowed with mind and affections, with a feeling heart and a thinking soul, there is not one of our race, however degraded, that the whole earth could satisfy, nor one longing for happiness in any one breast, that the whole material universe could fill.

The man born from above knows this well; but I appeal not to him; no, nor to that wretched groveller in the dust, whom the disappointments

of life have soured and wounded. I ask the happiest of you all, the young, and light-hearted, and prosperous—What is the world to you? It may be your all; but are you satisfied with your all? Has it not left wants within you? great and painful wants, which you can neither get rid of nor quiet? Conscience tells you it has. You could hardly define them, you never talk of them, you try to bury them deep in the secrecy of your own breasts, to lose the sense of them in the excitement of pleasure or the hurry of business, but you feel them still; there are moments when you hardly know how to bear them, when you feel such thirstings within, and such dissatisfaction with every thing without you, that the world seems a desert, and you starving in it and wretched. And this feeling of desolation all springs from one source—you are as sheep that are lost. You are at a distance from God, the fountain of happiness; and the blessedness that flows from his presence, is consequently at a distance from you.

2. And think of *the danger* of such a state.

A sheep in eastern countries, when away from the shepherd, is never safe. No animal is beset with more enemies, or exposed to greater perils. And to what are we exposed? To foes so numerous and dangers so manifold, that the mind is bewildered as it contemplates them. A soul

delivered from them, is one of the greatest wonders in the creation of God. It is one of the most splendid manifestations, we might almost say, one of the mightiest efforts, of his omnipotence. As such Saint Peter regarded it. He says of the redeemed, that they are "kept," and how? By God? by his grace and love? No; they are "kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation."

And to aggravate the dangers encompassing us, we are naturally fearless of them; unconscious perhaps of their existence; nay, we meet, we court them. A sheep straying where the lions come and the tyger roams, is a representation that does not come up to the fact. Behold that sheep running to sport by the tyger's side, going for rest in its weariness into the lion's hiding place; and there is a more exact emblem of man's danger and man's recklessness.

3. And we must add to these features of our condition yet one more;—*helplessness*.

The sheep has neither strength to overcome, courage to resist, nor swiftness to elude, its enemies. Its preservation depends entirely on the shepherd's arm and the fold's security. And herein again it represents us and our state with fearful precision. Not that in this helplessness, considered in itself, there is any thing fearful. It is the birthright of every creature, and a birth-

right which he can never alienate or lose. We are all constituted at first, and we are all kept to the last, equally and completely helpless. The sheep in the fold is just as powerless as the strayed sheep on the mountains; and the highest archangel who does the bidding of Jehovah in heaven, has no more strength in his own arm, than the most lost of lost men; he is no more able to satisfy his own soul, than to create a world. And place even us in heaven, place us any where so that we are by the side of our God, and we may rejoice in our weakness. It binds us to the Holy One; it is a claim on his pity and care, which he never disowns. But when separated from God, this weakness of our nature, a good when near him, becomes an appalling evil. There is ruin in it. "Every one that findeth me," said the wretched Cain, "shall slay me;" and we may say the same of all the perils that beset us. Left to ourselves, we have neither the power nor the will to escape them. Assault is the same as defeat; temptation is another word for sin, and danger another name for destruction.

This is our condition, brethren, and in this condition, and in all the need, peril and weakness, of it, every redeemed spirit was once involved. The parable places him in the midst of its wretchedness, and then goes on to tell us how he was extricated.

II. It bids us notice, secondly, *the conduct of Christ towards him.*

1. And the first circumstance that strikes us in this, is the Redeemer's care and concern for the lost sinner. He is aware of his loss; *he misses him.*

Amongst a hundred sheep, it might have been conceived that the absence of one would probably escape observation; and even if discovered, would occasion very little concern: but the parable takes the reverse of all this for granted. It supposes that every one of the flock is under the shepherd's eye; that when it strays, its wandering is noticed and its loss felt. And the same Bible that describes the Lord Jesus Christ as the great Shepherd of his church, describes him as a Being whose care is not only extensive, reaching to all the worlds that crowd his universe, but particular and close; fastened as much on every creature his hands have formed, as though he had formed none other, as though that one creature were the only object of his care. And when we add to this another truth, that he has a special love for this fallen world as the chosen theatre of his manifestation, and sojourning, and glory; and a more peculiar love still for those in it whom he has bought with his blood; we need not wonder that neither the glories of heaven nor the confusion of earth, can conceal the wandering of one poor

sinner from his eye. Besides, his sheep are his charge ; he received them as a sacred trust from Jehovah to be returned to him again ; and as a faithful Servant, he must watch over this charge : the flock which his Father has given him, must be complete. Hence he speaks of himself as exercising a care far beyond that of any earthly guardian ; as knowing not only the number of his people, but their persons, and characters, and names ; and deriving a part of his excellence and glory from this knowledge. " I am the good Shepherd," he says, " and know my sheep." " He telleth the number of the stars," says the psalmist ; " he calleth them all by their names ;" but he says of himself, " He calleth his own sheep by name." And if this be not enough, he turns again to his redeemed, and says to them plainly, without exaggeration or metaphor, " Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

2. A care thus extraordinary in its nature, may naturally be expected to lead to action, and action as extraordinary as itself. And it does so. The Lord Jesus Christ *seeks the lost sinner*.

The shepherd in the parable is supposed to leave the ninety and nine sheep in the wilderness ; that is, safe amidst the cultivated grounds or inclosed pastures of the wilderness ; and to " go after that which is lost." And why does he go after it ? Because " that which is lost," can be

recovered by no other means. The wandering sheep never returns. Not like the dog or the dove, that will find its way back from almost any distance, it cannot retrace its steps. Once a wanderer, it wanders on for ever. And when did an erring sinner ever return to his forsaken God? Of his own accord, never; and were the world to stand ten thousand years longer, and were the same question to be asked at the end of those years, the same answer would still be given—never. The thing is impossible. Sin has rendered it impossible. It alienates man from God. It throws up a barrier between them in man's own heart. It deprives him of the very desire to return. Shew him the bridge that Christ has thrown over the gulph which separates earth from heaven, he will not so much as set a foot on it; he would rather starve and sink where he is.

But O the unsearchable grace of Jehovah! He goes after the creature that will not enquire after him. He comes down out of heaven, from the most glorious place in the creation, to one of the dreariest, and this he tells us is his errand, "to seek and to save that which was lost." And when arrived on the earth, no part of it did he leave unsought, that he might find his own. He goes to Samaria, to seek a lost woman there; to Bethany, to seek Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus; to guilty Sidon, to seek the woman of Canaan;

to accursed Jericho, to seek Zaccheus. He goes to the receipt of custom, that he may find the publican Matthew; to the sea-side, that he may call to himself and happiness Peter, and James, and John. And while hanging on the cross, in the very agonies of death, his work of searching is not suspended. He turns round to the crosses beside him, and finds on one of them a sheep of his fold, a companion for paradise. And the same work is going on now. By his word, and his ministers, and his providence, and his Spirit, he is at this day and at this moment seeking us; and were we on the very verge of destruction, nay, were there at this instant but a step between us and all that is fearful, he would follow us on; he would seek us still; he would still desire and labour to pluck us as "brands from the burning." Hear his own language by his prophet Ezekiel; "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day."

3. And this promise carries us on to another part of the Lord's merciful conduct towards the sinner;—*he finds him*.

He misses "that which is lost;" there is his

care, his watchfulness ;—he goes after it ; there is his anxiety, his diligence ;—he finds it ; there, his perseverance, his success.

And what are we to understand by his finding it ? Nothing more than his making sermons, and afflictions, and mercies, effectual ; causing them by his Spirit to do their appointed work ; overtaking the sinner by them in his way to ruin, stopping and turning him. Were the Saviour this moment to find you, he would not at once take you away from all the evils of your condition, but he would open your eyes to discover them, and your hearts to care about them. He would make you as careless about the world and all its concerns, as though you were on the point of leaving them ; as full of anxiety about eternity as though you saw its heaven and its hell lying open before you, and you were about to go into the one or the other. The sermon you are listening to, would be heard as never sermon was heard by you yet, and you would go from this house of God, and make your own chambers, perhaps for the first time since those chambers were built, places of prayer. And not this only ; you would feel yourselves lost ; you would see the wants, and dangers, and helplessness, of your condition ; and with a feeling which you never before experienced, you would cry aloud, “ What must I do to be saved ? ” And then you would cast

yourselves on Christ; and that would be the happiest moment of your life. Then indeed would you "be found of him." His hand would be on you, and his Spirit within you. A connection would begin between him and your soul, so close, that henceforth he would deem you one with himself; so sweet, that you would cheerfully give up all the world rather than have it severed; so lasting, that when all earthly ties are snapped asunder, this would be strong as ever, neither destroyed by time, nor impaired by change. You would be enabled to stand on the ruin of all that is dear to you, nay, on the wreck of a perished world, and ask with the exulting Paul, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? I am persuaded that neither death nor life; nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers; nor things present nor things to come; nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

4. The consequence of this union with Christ would be a blessed experience of another branch of his goodness, the consummation of his mercy towards the recovered sinner; *he bears him home*. "And when he hath found it," says the text, "he layeth it on his shoulders." We know why the

shepherd places it there. The sheep, worn out by its wanderings and hardships, may be unable to follow him; or it may be unwilling to return to the fold, or averse to the road that leads to it; or dangers may be thick around; the beasts of the wood may be lying in wait, and, even in the shepherd's presence, seeking to attack and devour. He accordingly places it on his shoulders, and thus ensures at once its safety, its comfort, and its arrival at home.

We need no apostle or prophet to explain to us a figure like this. It tells us of the distance still stretching itself out between us and heaven; of the mountains to be climbed and the wastes to be traversed; of the ten thousand labours and dangers that beset the road, and of our utter inability to avoid or surmount one of them all. It shews us the very weakest sheep in the flock, sinking down exhausted in the desert, far away from its rest; hungering for the green pastures of the fold, but unable to take one step in the way to them; and there, it says, is an image of ourselves. And then it tells us of the power we have so often felt raising up and sustaining us; of the arm we have rested on, and never yet found it fail us; of the ease, and security, and blessedness, with which we are passing through temptations and conflicts, and drawing near, almost without being aware of it, to a heavenly land.

It is cheering to think of the blessed Jesus as the companion of our pilgrimage; it imparts an unutterable delight to the soul, to feel that we are going up from the wilderness, leaning on our beloved; but this thought and this feeling come far short of the truth. We are not by his side; he tells us that we are on his shoulders, in his bosom, in his arms. "Thou hast seen," says the Redeemer to his church, "how that the Lord, thy God, doth bear thee." And then he bids us look forward, and says again, "Even to your old age, I am he; and even to hoar hairs, will I carry you. I have made and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you." And he will speak to us once more when he has brought us to heaven; he will say to us there, "Ye have seen how I bare you on eagles' wings," carried you with more than a shepherd's care, with a father's solicitude and a mother's tenderness, "and brought you" through clouds, and storms, and darkness, "unto myself." I bare you "as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came unto this place."

And observe, brethren, the peculiar force of this language. While it assures you of your safety, it represents that safety as depending every moment solely on the Lord Jesus. You can never perish, not because you have been "found of Christ," not because he has bought

you, and gone after you, and made you his own ; but because you are on his shoulder, carried by him, embraced by his arm, and upheld by his power. You are safe, but your safety rests not in yourselves ; it springs not from any thing that has been wrought within you or done without you ; it lies simply in this one thing—your being in the constant care and keeping of an omnipotent God.

And this is the view given us in this text of the conduct of Christ towards the people he loves ;—he misses them when lost, he seeks them, he finds them, he bears them home. What a wonderful expenditure of mercy on creatures so vile ! We, brethren, throw away that which is worthless, for we have no power to alter its nature or to give it value ; but the ways of the almighty Jehovah are not as our ways. The things that are worthless, are the very things that he gathers up. “ The weak things of the world, and base things of the world, and things that are despised, hath God chosen ;” and chosen for this very purpose, that he may glorify himself by making them the most precious and splendid of the treasures of heaven.

III. We have yet one point more to consider ;—*the feeling with which the great Shepherd of the church carries on his blessed work.* And this feeling is as wonderful as the work itself. It is

not pity, it is not compassion or kindness, no, nor yet love; it is joy, and joy overflowing; a joy so great, that the divine mind cannot hold it. The whole creation is called on to come and share its abundance. "He layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost."

We are ready perhaps to take this as a mere figure of speech, as little or nothing more than an eastern ornament of discourse, or, at most, as an accommodation of language to our contracted minds; meaning something perhaps, but much less than is expressed. And even if we give this language what we consider its full force, even if we admit that the Lord Christ actually experiences some joy in saving his church, we are tempted to think that it is only as man that he feels it. But the testimony of scripture on this point is plain and decisive. It declares that even in the divine mind itself, even in God considered as God, there is joy in the conversion and salvation of a transgressor's soul. Look at the parables following one another in this chapter. The main scope of them all is to imply, if not to express, this very thing. Look at the explicit declarations of the Holy Ghost. "God," says the prophet Micah, "delighteth in mercy," in pardoning, re-

deeming mercy ; it is congenial to his nature ; gratifying, delightful to his mind. Isaiah speaks of him when he comes to punish, as coming “ out of his place ” for this purpose ; and he repeatedly calls judgment “ his strange work.” “ Behold,” he declares in the name of Jehovah, or rather Jehovah himself declares by his lips, “ Behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy ; and I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people.” And hear Zephaniah, another prophet ; “ The Lord, thy God, in the midst of thee, is mighty. He will save ; he will rejoice over thee with joy ; he will rest in his love ; he will joy over thee with singing.” Now these and similar expressions can mean but one thing, and that the same thing which this text implies, and the verse following the text clearly asserts— “ there is joy in heaven over a sinner that repenteth,” joy among the angels, joy in the human soul of the exalted Jesus, and joy higher still, in the infinite mind of the infinite God. There is joy in seeking his people, joy in finding his people, joy in upholding and preserving his people, and joy yet more abundant in bringing them home ; a joy, of which the great Jehovah is not ashamed ; he publishes it amongst all the hosts of his angels, it is seen among the shining glories that surround him, it diffuses itself through the immense world he inhabits, it augments and

sweetens those pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore.

And now, brethren, let our thoughts come home to ourselves. The things we have heard concern ourselves. They concern us as closely and deeply, as though there were no other people whom they concern at all. The situation referred to in this parable either is or has been our own. We have a thousand times acknowledged it to be ours, and we have made this acknowledgment under such circumstances, that if we have been insincere in making it, we have "not lied unto men, but unto God." "All we like sheep have gone astray," was the confession of the church of old, a confession made to its fellow-men. We have said the same to the living God. We have said on our knees, and said it as though we were anxious for it to be heard in heaven, "Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep." Now if there are any amongst us who have really meant what these words import, any who feel themselves to be as sheep that are lost, in a starving, dangerous, and perishing condition; and, at the same time, deplore this condition, and long above all things for deliverance from it; then this scripture exactly meets their case. It admits the truth of all you can say concerning your misery and helpless-

ness; it takes you on your own ground; and standing there, it proclaims to you relief. It shews you One moving about that world of desolation, into which you have wandered; and taking out one after another from it, and bringing him to his home. It tells you that this Deliverer is able to save those who are utterly unable to save themselves; that he delights, rejoices, in saving them. And you are told this to let you see how able and willing he is to save you. This parable was never uttered to silence a company of murmuring pharisees; it has not been preserved through so many ages merely to grace the book that contains it; it has not been sounded this day in your ears to excite your admiration or wonder: no; its purpose is this—to reach your hearts; to send you to your closets and your knees, determined by God's help to be no longer as sheep that are lost, to cast yourselves on your Redeemer's mercy, to trust his grace, to prove his compassion, to add to his joy.

Are you ignorant of your spiritual condition? or knowing it, careless about it? anxious, half wearied out in providing for the body, but reckless about the immortal soul? Then let this scripture produce at least one effect on you;—let it cause you to wonder. The gracious conduct it describes, is not a mere fiction. Something like what it represents is actually going on, and going

on every hour. The blessed Jesus is anxious for the sinner that is lost, he is seeking and bearing home many a ransomed spirit, and is doing this with unutterable joy. He deems even the lost soul precious; it is never for one moment out of his thoughts: and yet though this lost soul is your own, you care no more for it than for the dust in your path. How can this strange thing be? Well may I ask, how can the rescuing of such a soul as mine delight an infinite God? but much greater reason have I to ask, how is it possible that its wretched and forlorn state does not distress me? There must be something radically amiss within me; something that perverts my judgment, and hardens my heart. This ease, in a situation like mine, cannot be prudent; this unconcern cannot be rational; this recklessness cannot be safe. What then is the root of this mischief? It is self evident;—I have a diseased nature. The Bible is true;—madness is in my heart. I must “be renewed in the spirit of my mind.” I must be made a new creature. I must be born again.

And what says this scripture to you who are returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls? to you whom Christ has sought, and found, and is carrying home? It bids you look back to the years that are gone. It asks you what you were in those years, and in what situation. You were

lost, and almost content to be lost; amidst wants, and dangers, and wretchedness, which you had no strength to escape nor eyes to discover. And where are you now? On your Saviour's shoulder. And why are you there? Because left to yourselves, you would be lost again; in a single hour, you would be as far from the fold of God, as you were in the darkest hour of your worst days. "By grace are ye saved," says this scripture to you; by grace alone. It bids you be humble, more humble than you have ever been yet. And then it tells you to look forward. How glorious the prospect that it opens! For creatures such as we are to enter heaven at all, is a wonder of mercy, a manifestation of goodness almost surpassing belief. Who that has ever caught a glimpse of heaven, does not say at times, "My polluted soul can never go there?" But to be brought there by Jehovah himself; to hear that holy world called on to exult in our arrival, and to find that call obeyed; to discover that the God whose love and even whose pity towards us we have so long suspected, is admitting us to the glory of his presence, and receiving us there, not with the cold commiseration we often ascribe to him, but with a joy so overflowing, so real and great, that his own infinite mind can hardly contain it;—is it not marvellous, brethren, that a prospect like this is ever

for one moment out of our thoughts? A feeling of self-abasement, a thrilling sense of our own nothingness, is the first and, it may be, the strongest emotion that ought to abide with us; but if we are not happy and thankful, where shall thankfulness and joy be found? In our Redeemer's arms, borne along by him in the way to his heavenly fold, our arrival there as sure as his grace, and power, and covenant, can make it, with scarcely a step between us and its blessedness;—we may weep and tremble, but then are our souls in the holiest as well as the happiest state, when we rejoice as we tremble; when our songs are more numerous than our tears; when praise is at once our work and our delight.

SERMON III.

THE UNBELIEF OF THOMAS.

ST. JOHN XX. 26, 27, 28.

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

IN the latter part of this chapter, we have an account of two interviews which took place between our Lord and his wondering disciples, after his resurrection from the dead. At the first of these interviews, Thomas, one of the twelve, was not present; and when his fellow-disciples

told him afterwards what had happened, he received the tidings with the most determined unbelief. "We have seen the Lord," was their joyful exclamation as soon as they met him, but their infatuated companion gives them only this chilling answer; "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Let us examine, first, the causes from which this strange unbelief proceeded; secondly, the manner in which our Lord treated it; and then, lastly, the remarkable confession by which it was ultimately followed.

I. All unbelief is of the heart, and when we look for the origin of it on any particular occasion, we must trace it to that deeply seated and desperate wickedness within us, which taints all the operations of our minds; which allows us to trust one another often and blindly, but never God. There are however secondary causes which bring this evil principle into exercise, or serve to manifest it; and these, in the instance before us, appear to have been two.

1. One of them was *the absence of Thomas from the assembly of his fellow-Christians.*

In the nineteenth verse of the chapter, we find the other apostles meeting together on the evening

of the first day of the week after their Master's crucifixion. Their object undoubtedly was of a spiritual nature—to talk of the marvellous events they had witnessed, and to join in supplication and prayer. They closed the door, it is said, “for fear of the Jews;” but what are doors, and bars, and difficulties, in the way of Christ, when he has a promise to fulfil, or an act of grace to perform? He told them before he left them, that where only “two or three” of them should “be gathered together in his name,” he would be “in the midst” of them, and now he comes and makes good his word. On a sudden, he appears before them in the very form in which he died. He stands “in the midst,” and saith unto them, “Peace be unto you.” And peace followed his words—a peace that almost turned the room in which they were sitting, into a heaven. “Then,” we read, “were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.” But from this scene of blessedness Thomas was absent; why, we know not. Hindrances that he could not break through, might have kept him away, or, more probably, he had suffered wrong feelings to discourage, or worldly business to entangle him. In either case, the effect of his absence was the same—he saw not the Lord. No peace entered his soul. While his fellow-disciples were rejoicing in all the confidence of certainty, he was harassed with

the dark workings of perplexity and unbelief.

And whence, brethren, proceed many of your doubts? And whence comes much of that darkness which so often beclouds your souls? Has your undervaluing of Christian communion and fellowship nothing to do with it? Look at this history. It teaches us that we can never tell what we lose by neglecting even one opportunity of public or social prayer. At the sacrament from which we have turned away, the Lord might have made himself known to us "in the breaking of bread." The sermon we have lost, might have been the very sermon we needed. It might have quickened us in our deadness, excited us to a holy thirsting after God, scattered the doubts which are perplexing us, or chased away the sorrows which are bowing us down, or let in light on that darkness within us, which, we say, nothing can pierce. The Saviour will honour the ordinances of his own appointment. It is in the palaces of Zion, that he makes himself "known for a refuge." It is in his house, that he most frequently and most conspicuously records his name, reveals "his power and his glory," and comes and blesses. The man therefore who most loves his house, generally sees the most of his glory; gets the clearest and most enlarged view of his perfections; knows him best, and consequently trusts

him most; and trusting him most, rejoices in him most; has the peace of God for his safeguard, and the joy of the Lord for his strength.

2. But the unbelief of Thomas must be traced to yet another cause;—*he seems to have adopted on this occasion a wrong standard of truth.* His fellow-disciples told him that they had seen the Lord; he refuses to believe them, not because he doubted their veracity, for they had been for three years his companions, and he knew them, in a matter of such moment, to be incapable of falsehood. He had not seen the Saviour himself, and therefore all he hears must pass for mistake or delusion. He must look on his wounded hands and feet, he must touch his pierced side, or he will not believe. He made his senses, in this instance, the exclusive criterion of truth, and consequently he rejected the evidence of ten upright witnesses, simply because he himself had not been a spectator of the fact to which they testified.

And this was little worse than the conduct thousands are pursuing in this Christian land at this very hour. To say nothing of the avowed sceptic, some of us judge of spiritual things by standards to which they disdain to be brought. We may not carry them, with Thomas, to the bar of our senses, but we try them by tests quite as foreign to their nature, and equally fallacious—our experience, our reason, our notions of right

and wrong, our view of probabilities, our conceptions of the fitness of things. We will not believe this or that alleged fact; we will not receive this or that doctrine; we cannot take the comfort of this or that promise; and why not? Because it is not found in the Bible? We say so perhaps, but while we say so, conscience reproves us. It is in the Bible, and we know it to be there; but then it appears to us so strange, it is so contrary to our experience, it militates so strongly against our feelings, it pours so much contempt on our judgment, our half idolized reason, that we ask, with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" and then, unlike Nicodemus, we persuade ourselves that they cannot be, and reject them. Thus do we make our own weak and depraved understandings the criterion of truth; thus do we set up the experience of a few fleeting years against the declaration of him "who inhabiteth eternity." We employ the reason God has given us, against God: we employ it against ourselves. It serves only to rivet our unbelief and aggravate our misery. Subdue the intellect of man, communicate to it a sense of its own weakness and the divine grandeur, bring its thoughts into a holy "captivity to the obedience of Christ," and then we may glory in it; we need not limit its powers, nor control its workings, nor check its enquiries: but elevate it against God,

set it to work to scan him, and his ways, and his word, by its own efforts in its own light; is there any thing in the universe so powerless, so contemptible? is there any thing of which we have greater reason to be ashamed?

Brethren, is the Bible true? Is it what it professes to be, a revelation from heaven? Here is a lawful subject of enquiry; here is a question which reason may investigate and common sense decide; but at this point we must stop. If the book is divine, a wise man has only one way of acting—he must receive as true all its contents. He is not to judge, but believe; not to speculate as to the reasonableness of its declarations, or their correspondence with his experience or notions, but to pray that they may live in his heart and regulate his life. They are the words of the living God; they rest on the testimony of One who can neither deceive nor be deceived; and what matters it whether my dark mind approves or condemns them? Lord, open thou my understanding to comprehend, and give me grace to believe them.

II. Consider, in the second place, *the manner in which our Lord treated the unbelief we are examining.*

1. And here observe, first, that *he gently punished it.* He leaves Thomas for eight days racked

with suspense ; and then he records his sin in his imperishable word ; to this very day it is spoken of to his shame.

And he acts thus with all his people at all times. He makes their sin their punishment. He knows how to pardon it ; as far as regards an eternal world, to blot it as entirely out, as though it had never been committed ; and yet, at the same time, he marks it with his displeasure. He shews himself at once a gracious and a holy God, "pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin," but making his people feel, and making the world see, that he hates while he pardons it. "I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes," is no idle threatening. There is scarcely one in the church of Christ, who has not experienced its truth ; who has not learned that even with heaven before him, and goodness and mercy following him, it is yet "an evil thing and bitter" to forsake the Lord, his God.

2. But though Christ punished the unbelief of Thomas, *he most tenderly removed it.*

At the end of eight days, he appears again among his disciples. Thomas is now with them. As soon as he had repeated his former salutation, "Peace be unto you," he singles out this erring man ; lets him know, by the first words he utters, that he was well acquainted with his unbelief ;

and then acts just as Thomas had prescribed ; he gives him the very evidence his presumption had dictated. " Except," says Thomas, " I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." And what said Jesus ? " Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side."

And mark the contrast between the conduct of our Lord towards this unbelieving disciple, and that which he manifested a few days before towards the faithful Mary. In the beginning of this chapter, we see her coming, full of grief and love, to his sepulchre. She finds it empty ; her Lord had left it. One disciple after another comes to it, looks into it, sees it forsaken, and goes away. But Mary goes not away ; she still stands at the sepulchre, wondering, and enquiring, and weeping. Angels come down from heaven to comfort her, but even angels are nothing to her. She does not so much as ask them their errand ; nay, she hardly notices their presence. " They have taken away my Lord," she cries, " and I know not where they have laid him." For any thing save him, she has not a feeling or a thought. And who ever thus thirsted for Christ, and Christ did not come to that earnest seeker ? This answer brought him to Mary ; she sees and recognizes

him; the next moment, as Saint Matthew intimates, she falls at his feet, and, in the deep emotion of her soul, clasps them in her arms. And now surely we shall find the Saviour commending affection like this, half meeting such love. No, brethren; the very same Jesus that said to the unbelieving Thomas, "Thrust thy hand into my side," repulses the beloved Mary from his feet. He says to her, "Touch me not," and the next moment sends her out of his presence. And why this difference? To shew the strong in faith how much he values active service above mere feeling; to shew the weak in faith how low he can stoop to their infirmities. Mary needed not any further evidence; she is therefore denied it. Thomas asked for it, he seemed to need it; it is therefore offered him.

And where is the weak-hearted Christian, who has not experienced something of this divine compassion? We are tempted at seasons to distrust the loving-kindness of the Lord. The circumstances in which we are placed, are peculiarly trying. They depress and perhaps weaken the mind, so that reason or principle has but little hold on it. Filled with suspicion and perplexity, we seem incapable of any spiritual feeling or act. Faith gives way. The promise becomes a dead letter. The Bible that was wont to be to us cheering and warming as the light, has lost its

power; we find it little better than a blank. All is darkness. We accordingly say, in the heaviness of our hearts, "All these things are against us." We conclude that the Lord has "forgotten to be gracious;" that he has cast us off for ever. But no. In the midst of our mournful distrust, he condescends to our fears. He meets us as he met Thomas, on our own terms, in our own way. He gives us some sensible token of his presence and favour. He sends us a signal mercy, and sends it in such a way, that we cannot mistake its source or its character. He says, "Thrust thy hand into my side." He comes and speaks peace to us by his providence, as well as by his word; by imparting feeling, as well as by reminding us of his promises; and then, brethren, who so blessed as we? He makes us wonder at his condescension. We know not how to believe that a God so highly exalted, should stoop down to observe the weakness and remove the suspicions of such hearts as ours. We almost tremble, as we weep with gratitude and joy over the tenderness that seems too great to be real.

3. But the Saviour did more;—*he wisely overruled the unbelief of Thomas for his own honour and the good of his church.*

He caused it to magnify himself. It drew from him a fresh exhibition of his own excellency. It unveiled anew his forbearance and tenderness.

It proves him to have brought with him from the grave the same heart that he carried about with him in the scenes of his humiliation. It tells us that he is the same Jesus on his throne, as when he stooped down to wash the feet of his disciples, or groaned at the tomb of Lazarus his friend.

Besides, the incredulity of this man has done much to establish the fact which it at first impugned. We see at once that the men by whom our Lord had surrounded himself, were not men of easy credence; men who, without examination, would receive as true any tale that corresponded with their wishes. If they were weak men, their weakness manifested itself in the backwardness with which they yielded to the force of evidence; in the obstinacy with which they adhered to pre-conceived opinions, in the pertinacity with which they held the ground they had once taken. It was weakness which opposed itself to any thing new and unexpected, and almost deemed itself humbled, when forced to admit as a fact that which tallied not with its own experience and knowledge. "I will not believe," said Thomas. With the testimony of ten honest, well known men before him, he could not have uttered a more unreasonable speech. And when he went on to mention the kind of evidence that would satisfy him, he could not have made a more absurd demand. But after a

few days had transpired, this very Thomas was satisfied. And when a few days more were gone, he is standing forth among the other disciples in the streets of Jerusalem, a voluntary witness of the fact he had questioned, and ready to shed his heart's blood in confirmation of its truth. His testimony to the resurrection of his Lord was the triumph of evidence over obstinacy, the homage which truth extorts from incredulity and pride. Thus does he who "ruleth in heaven," force all things to serve him. Thus does he compel the very sins of his servants to do him honour, and further his purposes of grace; not altering the nature of evil, not concealing his abhorrence of it, not lessening its fearfulness, not suffering his creatures to make light of it, but yet employing it to display the glory of his character, and the bright lustre of his perfections. Sin—we can never too much hate and detest it; never be too much afraid of it; but what does the great God do with it? He finds it in the world, and he means to root it out of the world, to destroy it utterly; but before it perishes, he makes it shew forth his holiness and goodness, the authority of his law and the glory of his grace; and so shew them forth, as nothing else ever exhibited them, as all the purity and all the happiness of heaven never displayed them. The foundation of the cross, the ground it stands on, is human guilt, the

sin of man;—sin not trifled with, nor encouraged, nor winked at; but abhorred and branded, and then pardoned, and so pardoned, that the loudest song in heaven is that which speaks of salvation and pardon. We may safely trust God, brethren. He is on his throne; and while there, all the creatures that his hands have formed, in all their actions, shall either willingly or unwillingly do him homage.

III. But we shall see this truth in a yet stronger light, if we proceed to consider, thirdly, *the remarkable confession by which the unbelief of the apostle was eventually followed.*

And we are indebted for this confession to this unbelief. Not that it had its origin in it, but the other disciples would never have heard it, we should never have read it, nay, it would not have been uttered, had it not been for the sin by which it was preceded. The Saviour first punishes his offending servant—there is his holiness; then comes his wisdom—he so corrects and overrules his error, that its ultimate effect, its final consequence, is one of the plainest and strongest declarations of his greatness, that ever came from earthly lips. This faithless apostle rises in one instant above himself. “Reach hither thy finger,” says his once buried Master to him, “and behold my hands; and reach hither

thy hand, and thrust it into my side ; and be not faithless but believing." And what followed ? Do we see Thomas stretching forth his arm, and availing himself of this condescension ? At that moment, he would probably have perished, rather than touch his Lord. He at once acknowledges and adores him. And what does he say ? Does he rest satisfied with an open avowal of his resurrection ? No ; he carries his confession of him beyond the other apostles, beyond perhaps the evidence before him. He sees in that risen man, the Lord of the universe ; in that condescending Jesus, the God who made him ; in that once pierced and crucified Nazarene, the eternal Jehovah. Thrilling with the profoundest humility and awe, he exclaims, " My Lord and my God."

And how did his Master receive this declaration ? It ascribed to him nothing less than divinity. Now when divinity was ascribed to Paul and Barnabas at Lystra, they " rent their clothes," we are told, " and ran in among the people, crying out" that they were " men of like passions with" themselves. And twice in the Revelation of Saint John we find an incident of the same kind taking place in heaven. Overpowered by the splendour of the angel who talked with him, John falls at his feet to worship him ; but the angel at once rejects the worship. " See thou do it not," says he, " for I am thy fellow-servant.

Worship God." But mark the contrast. Thomas addresses the risen Jesus as God, and he, instead of reproving and silencing him, accepts the homage. "My God," says the disciple, and the lowly Jesus receives the title without a single expression of displeasure or surprise, precisely as though nothing beyond the truth, nothing even unusual, had reached his ears. How can this inference then be resisted, that he who is the man Christ Jesus, is, at the same time, "God over all, blessed for ever;" equal to the eternal Father and Spirit in glory and greatness; an object of adoration, worship, and praise?

I know, brethren, what they urge against this inference who deny the Godhead of the Saviour; but really their answer is so strange, not to say pitiful, that none but those men could urge it, or think of it. They represent the language of Thomas not as a confession, but as an exclamation, the natural language of sudden surprise or fear. But when on any other occasion did surprise or fear produce such an effect as this in Christ's presence? He would not have borne it. It would have been profaneness. Besides, the account says that the words were addressed to Christ; that his startled disciple did not exclaim about him, but directed what he said to him. "Be not faithless but believing," says the Saviour. "And Thomas answered and said unto him, My

Lord and my God." And again, if we regard the words as an unmeaning exclamation, how do we connect with them the language that follows? "Thomas," says Christ, "because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed." Where is the evidence of his belief? According to this strange view of the passage, there is none; all is abrupt, unnatural, and strange. And just as strange is that boasted faith in the Bible, which rejects the divinity of the Lord Jesus. There is no harmony, no consistency, in it. It is so different from the usual operations of the human mind, so unlike every thing else that we are accustomed to call belief, departing so widely from all ordinary modes of interpreting language and receiving ideas, that we try in vain to comprehend its nature or define its extent. It puzzles us as much, as though we were told of sight that could discern every object in the creation save the glorious sun, or of love that could do every thing but think of, and cherish, and delight in, the creature it adores. Let others, brethren, explain and defend such a faith as this; our peace of mind, and our blessedness also, lie in something directly opposed to it; in a faith which views Jesus of Nazareth as seated on a throne lofty as the right hand of Jehovah, which compels us to feel, while we worship him as God over all, that we have hardly one adequate conception of his greatness, which

makes us consider the very dust at his feet as too honourable a place for us, and yet fills the soul with an unutterable desire to go where he is, that it may behold his glory. High thoughts of Christ constitute the very essence of a sinner's religion; they are the foundation of his hopes and the materials of his happiness. The glory of the Saviour, his eternity, his godhead, are not mere matters of speculation, points which affect the understanding only, they reach the heart; they are the main springs of all that a real Christian feels, and hopes, and does, and enjoys. Take them away from him, and his religion goes with them. His expectations perish. You have left him nothing that helps him. The man is again a benighted wanderer, without a home or a refuge. But what is he with them? What is he when a sense of his Redeemer's greatness is thrilling and almost overwhelming his soul? What these eleven disciples were, when they saw their Lord; what he would wish all the world to be—glad and happy; not at rest in the earth, but content and peaceful in it, and sure of all he desires when he leaves it; a cheerful pilgrim on his way to a blessed home.

And his happiness flows, in a great measure, from the connection that exists between this glorious Being and himself, or rather from his knowledge of this connection. Thomas does not ac-

knowledge the divinity of Christ as the worshippers of Baal acknowledged the supremacy of Jehovah; "The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God." There is more here than the conviction of the understanding; he speaks the language of appropriation, of affection, and confidence. Encouraged as much by his Master's tenderness, as humbled by his greatness, he says in the overflowing of his rejoicing heart, "My Lord and my God."

Is your faith, brethren, of this kind? Does it rise up to the confidence which language like this implies? If not, the greatness of Christ, the majesty of his person, the splendour of his perfections, the glory of his power, will afford you no pleasure in the contemplation of them, will yield little or none of that delight which they communicate to the established soul. No wonder if at times they distress you; no wonder if you even wish them forgotten or diminished. But when we are enabled to say of him, "My Lord and my God;" when the soul, in conscious guilt and helplessness, throws itself on his mercy; when it feels itself in his care and keeping; when it hears him saying to it, "Thy sins are forgiven thee: I am thine;" and when, in the confidence that his own Spirit inspires, it can answer, "I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord. Thou art my refuge and portion;" then, brethren, the soul rejoices in its Re-

deemer's greatness, exults in his power, glories in his loftiness. In his elevation, it sees a pledge of its own, a warrant for the most aspiring hopes that the happiest mind in its happiest state ever formed, and an object of contemplation that can for ever expand, while it delights, its thoughts. If this God is my God, it says, what can I want? I have all the plenitude of his grace and goodness to bless me. Every perfection that constitutes his glory, is exercised for my welfare, is on the stretch for my happiness. And what a prospect before me! His kingdom is mine, his joy is mine, his very likeness is mine.

Again, brethren, ask yourselves, is this happiness yours? Whether we acknowledge him or not, the risen Jesus is Lord and God. Is he your Lord? is he your God? Were he now standing before you, or rather were you summoned to stand before him, could you feel in the presence of one whom you have really sought as a Saviour, and obeyed as a Master, and loved as a Friend? O if he is not yours; if among the objects you have sought and loved, he has had no place; how wretched, how fearful, is your condition! It is wretched and fearful now, but what will it be soon? To look on the blessed Jesus seated in his once despised form on the throne of his glory; to behold in his sacred body the marks of his dying love; to gaze on his pierced hands, and bruised feet,

and wounded side; to see thousands of your fellow-sinners rejoicing in his presence, sharing his triumph, and making the very heavens ring with the sounds, "This God is our God for ever and ever;" while you, banished to an awful distance from him, are constrained to cry aloud in your anguish, "This God is not my God, nor will he nor can he be mine for ever and ever;"—there is something tremendous in this prospect; but tremendous as it is, it will soon cease to be a prospect: it will be a near and awful reality. The heavens above your heads will be rent; the Son of man will come in his glory; you will stand in the brightness of his presence at his bar. It is madness to forget this scene of terrors. We are more to be pitied than the wildest madman, if we delay for a single hour to prepare to meet it. The Lord Jesus Christ is still "waiting to be gracious." He is still a Saviour; as tender hearted now, as when he first rose from the dead; as willing a Saviour, as when he lay down in the manger or stretched out his arm on the cross. Take him as your Saviour. Believe his promises, repose in his word. Become his by faith, and he will become yours—your salvation, your portion, your joy; all you would have him become; more than you or any angel in heaven can ask or think.

SERMON IV.

THE REDEEMED SINNER MADE A TEMPLE OF
GOD.

I CORINTHIANS vi. 19, 20.

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God? and ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's.

WE hardly know which to admire most in this exhortation, the strength or the grandeur, with which it is enforced. It makes duty appear so reasonable, that we feel at once condemned if we shrink from it; and yet where in the whole Bible is there found a loftier description of the Christian's blessedness? a single text more calculated to allure, and warm, and elevate, our hearts?

And this is Saint Paul's usual manner. He connects with the duty he inculcates some exalted privilege, and thus ennobles the service to which he calls us; causing us, when in our right mind, to glory in our work while we are performing it. Here he tells us, first, whose the Christian is—he is God's; secondly, how he became God's—he has been "bought with a price;" thirdly, what God makes him—"the temple of the Holy Ghost;" and then, lastly, what God expects from him—glory.

I. Before the apostle tells us *whose we are*, he states a fact which makes it evident that we must have some master. He says, "Ye are not your own;" and in saying this, he seems to have in his mind the two classes of men, of which the Corinthian population was composed. These were freemen and slaves; and by slaves, I mean an order of servants happily unknown in our own free country—bondmen who were the absolute property of their masters. "Now ye," he says, "are not freemen. Ye are not your own. You are not the proprietors of your own persons, nor the masters of your own actions, neither are you at your own disposal. You are altogether in the power of another; in bondage."

And this is no mere figure of speech. It is as strictly, as extensively true, and true of us, as

that we are breathing and living men. I know that if we look around us, it does not appear true; few indeed are the traces of this fact to be discovered in the world; but what is the world? It is a world not only of sheep wandered from the fold, of children a great way off from their Father's house; it is a world of rebels, of fugitives—servants who cannot exist unless they eat of their Master's bread, and yet are determined neither to do their Master's work nor obey his laws. Freedom, independence!—it is the boast of earth, the pride of man; but go into heaven, go into any world that is a happy world, and the very sound of it would dismay. The creature's real glory and real happiness consist in the creature's willing dependence on the God who made him. And this the Christian feels. While others are proudly asking who is lord over them, spurning in their actions all heavenly control, and often indignant at the human laws that bind them, he recognizes and owns the right of another to him. He is God's, and he knows himself to be God's; more than his servant—his property; and not as our children or servants may be said to be our property, but in a closer, stricter sense. He stands in the same relation to his Master in heaven, as that in which a Greek servant stood to his earthly lord. He is dependent on him, at his disposal, so completely under his authority and within his

power, that he is spoken of by Saint Peter as living every moment "under his mighty hand."

And the apostle extends the right of God to the whole man. We should have said, "It is folly to write his blessed name on these vile frames of ours, these bodies of dust. Give God the heaven-born soul, the immortal spirit; but this thing of weakness and degradation, this inlet to the soul's misery, and this instrument of the soul's corruptions, and this shackler of the soul's powers, its prison and its torment—let the beasts of the field, or the birds of the air, or the winds of heaven, or whoever will, claim and take it. It is not worthy a care or a thought." But the great God says, "No; that body also is mine. I formed it; it displays in every limb and movement my power and skill; a soul dear to me as my own existence, has dwelt within it; and none besides me shall be its lord."

And the text is not the only passage in which this condescending claim is urged. "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God," says Saint Paul, "that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." And here in this chapter, he uses language on this subject of remarkable strength, telling us that our bodies, as well as our souls, are included in that close but mysterious union which binds together, connects and makes

one, the Lord Jesus Christ and his church. "The body," he says in the thirteenth verse, "is for the Lord;" and then again in the fifteenth verse, he asks, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?"

And all this is true of the Christian at all times. It matters not where he is nor in what state, he is God's. Whether we are rejoicing in heaven or suffering on earth; whether our spirits within us are soaring upwards to the skies, or, pressed down by the burdens of life, are unable to rise above the low and dark scenes through which we are passing; and whether these bodies of ours are sleeping or waking, inhabited by the spirit or forsaken of it, breathing the air or the food of worms; God still says concerning us, concerning every living soul and every clay-built dwelling-place which a soul has occupied, "They are mine." When the things that are ours, are marred, or defiled, or worn out, we throw them away from us, but not so the Lord. His love for his own never varies; his union with them never weakens; his claim to them he never foregoes nor conceals. He is as willing to acknowledge for his own the beggar in his coffin, as the king on his throne; the sinner weeping on the earth or mouldering in its dust, as the angel rejoicing at his own feet in the heavens. "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; for whether we live, we

live unto the Lord ; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord ; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's ; for to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living."

II. But *how came the Christian to be God's?* He is said to have been "bought with a price."

These terms which are of frequent occurrence in the New Testament, were perfectly intelligible in the countries where they were written ; and they will be equally so to us, if we carry our minds to the same countries, and keep in view their peculiar customs and habits.

The Holy Spirit, you remember, is speaking of the converted sinner as God's property, connected with him just as a Corinthian slave was connected with his master. Now there were at Corinth several ways by which one man might become the property of another. He might be born of a slave, and then his birth would give the owner of his parent a right to him also. But it is not thus that we become the members of Christ's blessed family. The fathers of some of us served him not ; and O if those fathers who serve him now, could entail a like glorious bondage on their children, what pangs and fears would many a torn heart be spared !

Another mode of acquiring property in a fellow-

creature was by purchase. And this was a transaction so common in Greece, that all the people were quite familiar with it, and would consequently enter at once into the meaning of any illustration drawn from it. When therefore the apostle says of God's servants, "they are bought with a price," in order partly to keep up the metaphor which he had previously adopted, he waves that right to them which God possesses as their Creator—a right founded on their very being, and which nothing but annihilation, the utter loss of that being, can destroy; and brings forward another claim; not a more valid claim than that which creation gives, but more peculiar, and endearing, and ennobling; a title by which among the millions of creatures that throng the universe, even the Lord almighty can claim none other as his own. He says, "Ye are mine, for I have bought you with a price. I have done that for you, which I never did for any but you—I have made a sacrifice; parted for a time with the most precious of all my treasures to make you mine."

Not that by employing such a figure, the apostle sanctions the custom to which it refers. His noble soul would have disdained the thought of man's bartering his fellow-man for silver or gold. But he makes use of human oppression to illustrate divine mercy. He sees man devoted to man, obeying his will and subject to his dis-

posals; and his spiritual eye discovers there an image of his own condition, an emblem of his own duty to a higher Lord. He recollects the means by which that bondman became his master's slave; and even this base transaction begets in his holy soul spiritual ideas: it is turned into a representation of his own transfer from Satan to God. He goes no farther. He no more countenances slavery by the allusion he makes to it, than he commends the outrages of the Olympic games, when he bids us emulate the earnestness they displayed.

In carrying on this illustration, he does not tell us the price which the Lord Jehovah has paid for his people. It needed not to be mentioned. Besides, his silence concerning it bespeaks the high sense he had of its value. It is his usual way, when his mind is deeply impressed with the importance of any thing, not expressly to mention it, but to bring it before our minds by what often appears at first only a slight allusion. Thus the day of judgment, that most momentous of all days, he often places distinctly in our view without ever naming it. You have an instance in his prayer for Onesiphorus, in the first chapter of his second epistle to Timothy. "The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day." And a still more striking instance of the same peculiarity, he affords us in the twelfth verse

of the same chapter. Three important objects are occupying his thoughts—his own soul, his beloved Saviour, and the great day of final account; and these objects he fastens on our thoughts, before we are aware that he has made no explicit mention of any one of them. “I know,” he says, “whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

Precisely similar to this is his language in the text. “Ye are bought with a price,” he tells us; “a price so well known, so much in your thoughts and mine, so wonderful in the mode of its payment, and so much more wonderful still in the vastness of its amount, that no mortal tongue can be required to name it; you can never forget or mistake it.”

And is the case altered now? Need any one of you, Christian brethren, be told what that price was, by which you were redeemed? Never. On such a point the slightest hint is enough. You may forget the mother who bore, and the father who cherished you; the scenes of your childhood, and the companions of your youth; you may forget the friends you have buried, and the tears you have shed, and the burdens you have borne; every object you have loved may fade away from your remembrance, and not a trace be left of the ten thousand times ten thousand emotions your

souls have known; but never, never, while one fragment of memory shall last, can you forget that the price paid for your bodies and souls, was the precious blood of your incarnate Lord; precious indeed! so precious that in comparison with it, all the silver and gold the earth contains, is as dross, and all the created riches of heaven as "the dust of the balance." He esteems it precious, in whose sight the universe is as nothing; who can dash the whole creation to pieces, and yet never feel his dominions lessened, and build it again, and scarcely deem his possessions increased. "Ye were redeemed," says the Holy Spirit "with the precious blood of Christ." But Paul says more. Even language like this falls short of his lofty conceptions. By one of those bold figures which man must never have dared to think of, had not God first taught him to use them, he raises yet higher the amount of this ransom. As though determined that none should misrepresent its nature or lose sight of its worth, he says when speaking to the elders of Miletum of the church, even this earthly, afflicted, polluted church, "God hath purchased it with his own blood."

His meaning is obvious. Money transferred the Greek slave from one master to another; so the blood of the Lord Jesus is the means whereby the sinner is rescued from his native thralldom, and brought "into the glorious liberty of the

children of God." By sin he became the property of another, the servant of Satan. His holy Lord ceased to own him; he acknowledged Satan's claim to him; he gave the man up to him as his lawful victim. The blood of Christ makes an atonement for the transgressor's sin; in a legal sense, it does away with it, destroys it; and thus it annihilates that on which Satan's title to him rests. And now where is the believing sinner? the man who goes before the great Judge of all, and pleads what this blood has done, and puts in his prayer to be restored to his rightful Lord? He is of the household of God, at his door, at his feet, in his arms; a servant still, but not bearing a servant's name, and scarcely standing in a servant's place; he is called on earth and in heaven, his friend and his son.

And this immense price was paid to bring about this result. All the tears that the Saviour ever wept, and all the conflicts he endured, and every pang that tore and racked him; the mocking and scourging; the nails, and the thorns, and the cross, and the spear; the horror within and the darkness around him;—this was the one great end and design of them all, that we might be God's, and know ourselves to be God's, and act like those that are his. "He gave himself for us," says the apostle again, "that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto him-

self a peculiar," or, as the word originally signifies, an acquired, purchased "people, zealous of good works."

III. But we find this truth placed in a yet stronger light. Consider, thirdly, *what the great Jehovah does with the people whom he takes as his own.*

And now the Holy Spirit changes the metaphor. He represents the purchased and redeemed slave under one of the most dignified and lofty figures to which the mind can rise; a figure still familiar, but investing the happy object of pardoning mercy, with a wonderful and almost fearful grandeur. "Bought with a price," made over to God, God in that moment forms him a temple to himself. "Know ye not," asks the text, "that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?"

We all know what a temple is. In its primary sense, the term denotes a place dedicated to the honour and worship of some deity, and supposed to be favoured occasionally or constantly with his presence. The expression must have been in hourly use at Corinth; for that idolatrous city was crowded with stately edifices of this kind. As Saint Paul uses the word, it conveys three ideas.

1. It imports a rebuilding, *a restoration.*

Man was originally the temple of Jehovah; an earthly but yet a magnificent structure, designed

to shew forth the power, and wisdom, and goodness, which could raise a fabric so glorious from materials so vile. But sin marred this beauty. It entered the temple, and, in one hour, all was a mournful ruin. Some traces indeed of its original glory may still be discovered, but to what do they amount? They serve only to shew the greatness of its degradation; how high man might have risen, and how low man has sunk. His noble understanding overthrown; his whole soul lying polluted in the dust; his powers, formed to contemplate God and know him, so shattered, that they cannot scan without an effort the meanest of his works, baffled in their proudest strength by an insect's wing, and taught their weakness by a blade of grass; his affections too, that once soared to the skies, now grovelling on the earth, rooting themselves in the ground as though they could find in this accursed ground their rest and their happiness—a spiritual being, and yet bounded in his ideas and enjoyments by material objects, without one longing after higher or purer things;—all within man testifies of some sad overthrow; all is disorder, havoc, and desolation.

But look again at this ruined creature. The blood of Christ has ransomed, and now the grace of Christ transforms him. In the very hour when he becomes the Lord's, a work of restoration is commenced within him, a rebuilding, a cleansing,

a putting to rights, an adorning, a process that never ends, till it brings shape, and beauty, and glory, out of a mass of ruins. And this is sanctification; that exercise of divine power on the human mind, which gradually restores to it its original excellence. It does more. It prepares the mind, not for paradise, but for heaven. It makes a man meet for heaven. It moulds him at last in body and soul into the perfect likeness of his glorified Lord. The old men wept, we are told, while building the second temple at Jerusalem after the overthrow of the first; they could not bear the contrast between the meanness of the one and the splendour of the other; but no recollections of departed greatness will mar the glory of the redeemed church, nor impair its gladness. It will emerge from its ruins in a beauty which man in his innocence never wore, in a magnificence which angels in their greatness never displayed, in a purity that will fill the mind of a holy God "with exceeding joy." It will be a temple such as earth could not bear, "a building of God" resting its foundations on the everlasting hills of heaven, the noblest work of its Author and eternal as his throne.

2. *Dedication* also is included in this figure. It is indeed this which distinguishes a temple from every other building; it constitutes its character. Without it, the most majestic fabric that

was ever reared, is deemed unworthy to bear this sacred name. Consequently the temple which Solomon built to the Lord at Jerusalem, was set apart for God; given up to him, on its completion, by a public and solemn ceremony.

And thus the purchased sinner is consecrated to holy purposes. There was a time when every sensual object could enter within his soul; the door of it stood ever open, and nothing was too vile to be admitted and fostered there. One base idol after another set up its throne within him, and was worshipped with a blind, but intense and unceasing homage. His life too corresponded with the sordidness of his inward condition. Nothing godly was ever seen in it. He served the world as devotedly as he loved it; sin held over him a visible dominion; he lived in the sight of men and angels a desecrated thing, no more sacred to the God who made him, than the stones on which he trod. Sovereign mercy at last interposed. "That man," said the Lord Jehovah, "have I formed for myself; he shall shew forth my praise." And then the grace of the Holy Ghost came down, and took possession of his soul. It separated him from the world; it marked him out as destined for high and heavenly uses; an object of divine complacency, a monument of power and goodness, a creature in whom an infinite God would for ever be glorified and admired.

And the man himself falls in with this design. Enlightened to see the will of heaven concerning him, discovering the splendour of the prospects opening before him, his mind awakes to a sense of his noble calling. He shakes himself from the dust. He detaches himself from the world. He yields himself unto God. He becomes his by an act of self-devotedness. While he lives on earth, he mourns that he is not more entirely surrendered to him; and longs for the time when every moment shall be employed in his service, and every thought and feeling of his soul shall shew forth his praise. As the name of the heathen god was written on the portico of the heathen temple, so his blessed Master's name is written on his forehead, and the world reads it there. There is a peculiarity, a sacredness, about him. He stands out among his fellow-men a dedicated thing. He is visibly and plainly God's.

3. A temple implies also *residence*, the abode of the Deity within it, to whom it is consecrated. Thus when Solomon dedicated his finished structure to Jehovah, the divine majesty, we are told, came down, and "the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord." The shechinah, as it threw its radiance over the mercy-seat, manifested that God had descended into the holy place, and regarded it as a habitation for himself. Nor was this all. There also he made himself known

to his people by tokens of his love, and outpourings of his grace. And has this building, brethren, in which we are now assembled, ever been blessed to any of you? Have you ever felt here the thrill of humiliation or the wrestling of prayer, the glowing of love or the soarings of hope? Have you ever known what it is to thirst for Christ, or enjoy communion with Christ, within these walls? Then all this has been because God has been here; because he has remembered and fulfilled his own gracious promise, "Where I record my name, I will come and bless." O may he record it more visibly and more gloriously here! May he more abundantly visit and bless you!

Now as the Lord dwelt in the Jewish temple, he comes into the souls of those that are his, and abides and dwells there. We must not conceive of him, Christian brethren, as far away from us, as stretching down his right hand from heaven to purify and bless us; nor must we be content with placing him as a companion by our side. We must labour to take in the idea of God lodging within us, of the Lord of eternity actually taking up his residence in our vile frames; not carrying on his work of mercy in the heart like a by-stander, but as leaven works in the meal, mingling itself with the mass it is changing. He speaks of himself in this chapter, as so blending his Spirit with ours, that they become one spirit. He bids his



apostle remind us in the text, that the Holy Ghost which we "have of him," is "in us." The same apostle tells us in another place, that we are the temple of the living God; and then he immediately assigns as a reason for investing us with so glorious a character, this ancient promise of God to his church, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them." And again, in a third place, he calls that church "an habitation of God through the Spirit."

Now to the man of the world this is all a mystery. He treats it perhaps as a fiction or a dream. And no wonder. It is understood only by experience, and of things like this he can have no experience in the ways he has chosen. To the man of God, it is a blessed reality. He wants no bright shechinah, no cloud of glory, no long train of reasoning, to discover to him his heavenly Guest. He knows not how he came there, but he knows that were not God the Holy Ghost within his heart, that heart would be a stranger to the love that often warms it, the peace that keeps, and the hope that cheers it. God never enters the heart alone. Blessings unspeakable follow in his train—light, and purity, and joy. He does not at once turn it into a heaven, but he makes it so much like heaven, that the happy Christian had rather be forsaken of the whole world, than have his God depart from his soul.



How glorious a privilege then is this! to be singled out from among the creatures of the universe, as a temple to Jehovah's praise; a temple, recovered to him by the blood of his Son, rebuilt by the stretching forth of his omnipotence, dedicated to his honour, and inhabited by the same high and holy Spirit that is one with himself and is as his own soul! And why are we told of this privilege? What is it to bring out of us? Wonder, exultation, and songs? No, brethren; duty, service. It is appealed to here as an undisputed, well known fact, to enforce on us this one command, "Glorify God."

IV. We are come then to our last subject of consideration—*the glory which God expects from us*. Indeed the developement of his own greatness is the end at which he aims in all his doings; and he aims at this end, because the creature's happiness rests mainly on this one thing, on his discovery and knowledge of the divine glory. And this glory consists not in any outward, accidental circumstances connected with God; it is not such a glory as results to a man from the office he fills, or the titles he bears, or the homage that is rendered him: the glory of Jehovah is inseparable from Jehovah; it consists in his perfections, his attributes, his intrinsic excellencies. To glorify him is therefore, first to discover these

perfections in him, and then to make them visible to others, to manifest them ; to display, wherever we are, his power, wisdom, holiness, and grace.

Now the redeemed sinner does this in two ways. He shews forth the glory of Jehovah passively. His very redemption, his rescued, happy condition, is a most wonderful exhibition, the most stupendous in the universe, of the divine attributes. In this point of view, the creation of a world is as nothing to the salvation of his lost soul. But in this command, we are called on to go a step farther. We are to glorify God actively ; in other words, so to speak, and live, and act, that all who see us, may be reminded by us of God, may be forced to discover and acknowledge in us the workmanship of his hands, may render a willing or reluctant homage to his greatness.

Evidently the service of the body is needed for this work. It is by the body chiefly as an instrument, that the work must be done. True, the seat of religion is the soul ; its home is the heart ; in itself, nothing is more secret and retired ; but then it is an operative, active principle. It has effects, and those effects are peculiar, visible, and marked. It calls the body into its service ; the eye, and the feet, and the hands, and the tongue. If our religion is not of this character, it is hardly worth our retaining. There may be some exercise of thought and some play of feeling in it, but

there is no vital godliness. A religion of bare sentiment or cold orthodoxy, an abstracted, sublimated devotion, may do for a cloister or a chamber, but it will never do in heaven, nor in the way to heaven. If I would display the glory of God, I must let men see the power of God over my own soul; and where are they to see this, but in my temper, my dispositions, my actions, my life? Inoffensiveness is a good thing, but it is not what God asks for. He says, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness," and then he demands of those who are his, active services, a revenue of praise.

Still the same work must be going on within. We are called on to "glorify God in our spirit." We must in fact glorify him there, before we can shew forth his praise at all. Right conduct must proceed from right principles. A holy life must have its spring in a holy heart. Hence God says, "My son, give me thine heart;" and by the heart, he means the whole inner man—all the powers and all the affections of the soul. In one word, what he expects from us, is nothing less than a living up to our character as his property, his servants, his temples; an entire consecration of ourselves in all we think, and say, and do, to himself. Our mental faculties—understanding, and memory, and imagination; our bodily powers—youth, health, and strength; our other talents—

time, property, and friends ;—he demands of us a complete renunciation of self in the use we make of all these, and as complete a dedication of them all to the glory of his own great name.

Brethren, what humbling considerations are these ! How abasing is every part of this subject ! abasing to the holiest of us, and the best ! You are told that you are not your own ; you know that you are not your own ; you bless God every day you live that he has made you his ; and when you think of yourselves as his temple, his dwelling place, with what a trembling yet elevated joy do you exult in the thought ! But where is the glory that the Lord expects from you ? where that display of his perfections, which he asks at your hands ? Our bodies we have often employed, as though God had no right to them, would never call us to account for the use we have made of them ; and as for our spirits, the world has occupied and well nigh absorbed them ; their noblest powers have been spent on earthly vanities, and their warmest affections have often settled in the dust ; they have sometimes been rivetted to a fellow-worm, as though no higher being had ever asked for them, and no price been paid to make them his. And all this has tarnished the divine glory, or at best concealed it. Our earthly-mindedness, our sloth,

our evil tempers and evil words, our drinking in the unhallowed spirit of the world and half falling in with its ways;—these things have been robbing the God we were created to glorify; the God we were restored and consecrated to praise. In our case, sin is sacrilege; it is a desecration of that which God has made holy; it is a dishonouring of him in the very place which he has set apart for his name. And he will not bear the insult. He would not even bear his earthly house at Jerusalem to be thus profaned. No unclean person was suffered to enter it. However free he might be from moral pollution, or however ignorantly he might have contracted ceremonial defilement, he dared not approach its sacred courts. And why was this? Why was God so jealous for the honour of his temple? Because it was his temple; because his name was on it, and his dwelling place within it. The more intimately it was connected with him, the more was he dishonoured and displeased by any pollution it received. And what does he say of the living temples he now inhabits on earth? “Know ye not,” asks the Spirit, “that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” And then he adds, “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” O then let this be the first prayer of every one

of us, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" and this the second, "May the love of Christ constrain me! May he who bought me with so vast a price, beat down in my soul all that opposes itself to a supreme love for him! Whatever else he may make me, whether poor or rich, sick or well, rejoicing or sorrowful, loved or friendless, may he make me "sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."

And ought not this subject to excite in some, perhaps in many of us, a feeling of alarm? I am not aware that I have in the least strained this scripture, attached to it one idea that it will not fairly bear. Now if I have not erred, and materially erred, in my representation of it, and the Holy Spirit did not err in writing it, the conclusion is irresistible—the religion of some of us is a delusion—it is a hollow, worthless thing. It not only comes short of what God asks for at our hands, it is in its nature altogether different. "Ye are not your own," he says; but we follow the devices and desires of our own hearts, we act day by day as though our souls, and bodies, and all we could command, were entirely our own; and our religion, while we are acting thus, never interrupts us. God says, "Glorify me." "Let your lives shew forth my perfections, and bring

honour to them as it shews them forth ;"—we have never had such a thought enter our minds. O brethren, pray for yourselves, that you may see the fallacy of such a religion as this, and give it to the winds. Stake eternity on it? Rather attempt to walk over a fathomless gulph on a shivered reed, or to cross the ocean on a plank.

SERMON V.

THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST.

ST. LUKE iii. 21, 22.

Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also being baptized and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son ; in thee I am well pleased.

WE often say, brethren, that a man's character is best seen in a man's life. And we are every day acting on this maxim : we watch the conduct of those whom we wish to understand. And why should we not apply the same rule of judging to the Lord Jesus Christ ? It is as true with reference to him as to any one of our fellow-men ; and, in fact, there is no other way of obtaining any impressive or distinct idea of his character. Prophets

have written of him, and apostles have testified concerning him; his people on earth have told us of his excellency, and all the songs of heaven speak his praises; but if we would know the blessed Saviour aright, if we would discover the clearest and most affecting exhibition of his perfections, we must turn to his life; we must endeavour to learn what he is, by what he has said, suffered, and done. And he himself invites our enquiries. He calls on us, in his word, to "look unto" him, to "consider" him, to "grow in the knowledge" of him, and he promises us as the effect of this scrutiny and the fruit of this knowledge, an increase of grace, a removing away from us of the faintness and weariness of our minds, the "multiplying" of our peace.

We have now before us the first event of his public life. Let us view it as a manifestation of himself, as an exhibition of his character. And may the light of his Spirit shine on it, and reveal to us in it his glory!

We will begin with the reason assigned for our Lord's baptism, then pass on to the baptism itself, and afterwards notice the wonderful event which accompanied or rather followed it.

I. Saint Matthew gives us *the reason why this baptism took place*. According to his account of the transaction, it appears that John hesitated at

first to baptize his Lord. "He forbad him," we are told, and he did this on the ground of his own inferiority and unworthiness. "I have need," he said, "to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" But had an angel been standing in that river instead of John, we might still have wondered that the holy Jesus should come there for such a purpose. Baptism is for sinners. It is an outward washing, indicative of inward pollution and a need of inward cleansing. But what pollution was there within that Saviour's heart? It was as free from stain then on the bank of Jordan, as it is now on the throne of God. Why then subject himself to a rite designed only for the polluted? He himself tells us. "Suffer it to be so now," said he to John, "for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." He is anxious to obey every divine law, to conform to every divine institution, to work out, to complete, a righteousness extensive as the divine commands.

And this answer exhibits the Saviour to us in two characters, each illustrating the propriety of his baptism, and each in its nature most gracious and endearing.

1. He stands here as *the Representative of his people*. Now they are an unclean people. Sin has tainted and defiled every one of them, and to such an extent, that they are loathsome in the sight of God; they must be so, for they mar the

beauty of his creation; and when their eyes are opened, they are loathsome also to themselves. It is plain then that before they can be happy, happy with God or happy in themselves, all this uncleanness must be done away, sin must be taken out of them, they must be sanctified as well as pardoned. And now look at the Lord Jesus Christ. It matters not how pure he may be in himself, he comes forth as the Representative of the impure, and as such he must demean himself; that is, he must submit to that ordinance which is emblematical of the cleansing they need. They require the purification of the heart, the washing of the Holy Ghost; he therefore must come to Jordan to be baptized, he therefore must have its waters poured on his own holy head. We argue from his appearing in their form, that he was the Representative of his sinful people; and then we argue from his being their Representative, that it became him to be baptized.

2. He was also *their Head*; standing in the relation to them of a Leader or Chief.

We know that baptism is to them more than an emblem; it is an entering into the church of the living God, a rite by which they connect themselves outwardly with God and with those that are his. And observe, it is not a rite of their own choosing or appointing; it was ordained from heaven. Is there then in the wide crea-

tion some Being constituted the Head of this people? Then it is meet and right that he should go down into the waters through which they have to pass; that he should sanction the ordinance of his own appointment, that he should teach all who come after him, to reverence and obey it. "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body," says the apostle; and Christ enters the body of his church, becomes a partaker of its duties and privileges, in the same way. The Captain of our salvation puts on himself the garb in which he arrays his soldiers. The Commander submits first to the oath that he enjoins on his followers.

Besides, Christ has been "chosen out of the people" over whom he is exalted. He is one of the body of which he is the Chief; one of "many brethren," though "the first-born" of all. And there is, on this account also, an evident propriety, as far as his holy nature will admit, of his being conformed to them. Their own hearts desire it. Their language is, "We know that the Beloved of our souls is holy, all purity within as well as all glory without; but there is no pollution in the laver in which we are commanded to wash; it will leave not a stain even on a heavenly garment; and we would have our Master use, and consecrate, and bless it. In all that is harmless, let him be like ourselves; and O may

his blessed Spirit work in us, till in all that is holy, we resemble him."

Am I making too much, brethren, of this matter? Is it going too far to say that for the sake of being conformed to you and to me, the great Saviour will bow down his head before John, and be baptized? The humble Paul goes much farther. In his epistle to the Hebrews, he ascribes to the very same cause the incarnation of Christ; he mentions it as one of the motives which drew down the Lord of the heavens into a habitation of dust. "Forasmuch," says he, "as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." And look at this history. The Lord is not baptized alone, on a day by himself or in a stream by himself. He is baptized with the people, as one of them, at the same time, in the same river, by the same hand. "When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized."

II. Let us look now at *his baptism itself*, and see what manifestations of his character we can discover there.

1. The first circumstance that strikes us in it, is *his simple obedience to the divine law*.

We have been considering one reason why he should be baptized, but there were many more reasons why he should be exempt from this rite.

John felt their force, and dissuaded him from proceeding, but to what did they all amount? The law of his God required of him this washing of water, and that for him was enough; he yielded a cheerful and determined obedience to it. True, he needed no washing; true, the rite was a ceremonial, and not a moral one; of no more importance in itself, than the whistling of the wind around him or the murmuring of the stream at his feet; but the command of his Father had gone forth, and he would not take a step in his career of mercy till the waters of baptism had passed over him.

A lesson for you, brethren. It bids you obey the divine law, not scan it. It bids you do the will of God, not criticise it. It says, "Let men talk as they will; let even the godly on the earth, ministers and prophets, reason, and explain away, and dissuade; let nature condemn and feeling shrink; all these things are as wind. Is the command plain? Then there must be no reasoning about the matter; no "conferring with flesh and blood." The right hand must come off; the right eye must be plucked out. You must go down with Christ into Jordan. You must "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." The will of God must be done; and every command of his obeyed.

2. And notice *the humility* manifested here, the amazing condescension of Christ.

From his childhood to the present hour, he had lain hidden in Galilee, unregarded and unknown ; a carpenter's son, with nothing about him to indicate the divinity of his origin or the glory he was heir to. He was now coming forth among men to vindicate his character, and make known his pretensions. And how does he appear? Working miracles and doing wonders? Bursting forth like the sun in his brightness? "Glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?" No; "he cometh from Galilee to Jordan, unto John, to be baptized of him." His first act is an act of degradation. He places himself as a sinner among sinners; he bows down to a rite that none but a sinner needs. And in doing this, he disclaims all condescension, he feels no humiliation; he makes a matter of propriety of it, of justice and necessity. In his estimation, it is only "fulfilling all righteousness."

But we can hardly form one faint idea of the extent of this degradation. We think perhaps of his appearing before John as an inferior, receiving, almost begging, a service of one who was not worthy to stoop down and unloose his shoes; and we say, "There was humility." All this however was as nothing. From eternity he had spoken to his creatures of sin as the abominable thing that he hated. It was the only thing in his universe, that he had taught them to hate. But now who and

what is he? Not indeed a sinner, but appearing as one; assuming a character he had bidden angels and archangels loathe. The manger, the stable, the carpenter's hut and the carpenter's toil—they were all as nothing; no word of his had poured contempt on any one of them; but to be the thing he had branded; to come forth into sight as though he were the character he abhorred; not merely to stand before the men of the earth and the wondering multitude of heaven, in “the likeness of sinful flesh,” but to act as though all the sinfulness of the flesh were upon and within him;—verily, brethren, this was the infinite abasement of an infinite God. We speak of the humility of angels; we ourselves feel perhaps at times a consciousness of degradation such as no language could describe, a sensation of meanness and vileness that shakes us; but what is it all? It is no more to be compared with the humiliation of Christ, than the waters of Jordan to the depths of the fathomless sea.

3. And mark also *the devotion* the Saviour manifested on this occasion.

Saint Matthew tells us that the people who came with him to John, made a public confession of their sins as they were baptized in Jordan. In their case, this confession was right. It was an act of humiliation, which harmonized well with the ordinance they were observing. The holy

Jesus however could take no part in it: he had not a sin to confess. But yet God is not robbed of his honour. He humbles himself before him by substituting for confession supplication and prayer. "When he was baptized," says the sacred historian, he was baptized "praying," openly praying; so praying, that his petitions were noticed, and probably heard, by the spectators around him. Indeed he seems to have begun and ended every event of his life, that had any peculiar importance in it, with peculiar prayer. He prayed before his transfiguration; he lifted up his eyes to his Father, when he bid Lazarus come forth from the dead; after he had fed the multitude in the desert, he "departed into a mountain to pray;" and in his agony, "he prayed more earnestly," prayed as though every feeling of his soul was a feeling of supplication.

Now these prayers all came from his heart. As man, he was a creature of God; and as a holy creature, he delighted in avowing his dependence on the Being who upheld and sustained him. But why were so many of his acts of devotion public? Why are we told of them? Undoubtedly to bring us on our knees, to make us men of prayer. He would teach us that God is to be thought of and acknowledged in all things; that there is nothing to be done or suffered aright without prayer; that as for ordinances, they are

forms and decencies without it, but nothing more. Sacraments and sermons, the reading of our Bibles and the bending of our knees—what are they all, brethren? Without a spirit of supplication, without the lifting up of an imploring heart to a holy God, they are just what we often find them to be—mere gestures, and words, and shows; powerless as “sounding brass or the tinkling cymbal.” These things save the soul alive? Things like these blot out the transgressions of a vile heart and a worldly life? We know that they cannot of themselves excite one feeling within us; they cannot drive away a care from the aching spirit, nor make one sorrow less.

III. We come now to our third subject—the *wonderful event which attended the scene of humiliation we have been contemplating*. “It came to pass,” says the evangelist, “that Jesus also being baptized and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.”

1. Observe here, in the first place, *the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ*; his dignity. And it is a remarkable fact that throughout his life, whenever we see him signally abased, we generally see his Father putting on him signal honour; as though

to support him in his degradation and recompense him for it; as though also infinite patience could not bear to look on One so high brought so low, without vindicating his majesty. He is born in a manger, but a star in the heavens proclaims his advent, and over him are ringing the songs of angels. He is nailed to a cross, but the shivered rocks, and the darkened sun, and the trembling earth, do him homage. He comes to Jordan to be baptized, appears as a sinner, and asks for the cleansing that sinners need;—there was a degradation and dishonour! but the heavens are opened, the Spirit descends, the voice of Jehovah cleaves the air, and where is the dishonour now? All rolled away. The humble suppliant, the cleansing water, are no longer thought of. We behold in this companion of sinners a greatness that startles and awes.

But how can we account, brethren, for this mixture of things? of things the most opposite in their character? this strange combination of meanness and loftiness? Only in one way—Jesus of Nazareth is God, as well as man. He is the everlasting Father, as well as the creature of yesterday; “the seed of the woman,” it is true, perfect man; yea, sunk so low, that he deems himself “a worm and no man, the very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people;” and yet he is the Lord of angels and the monarch of the skies; “God

over all blessed for ever." There is no other way of clearing up this seeming incongruity. Take any other ground of explanation, deny either the perfect Godhead or the perfect manhood of our Lord, and this passage, and every passage like it, is a riddle; nay, the whole Bible becomes the darkest book in the world.

2. We see here also *the Messiahship of Christ*.

Mean as was his appearance and lowly his demeanour, the pretensions of our Lord were yet of the most lofty character. He claimed to be none other than that Deliverer whose advent had been so long foretold and so ardently desired; the Son of the Highest; God come down from his throne to be the Redeemer of Israel. But how are these pretensions to be established? How is the Messiahship of this Jesus to be proved? God was determined to prove it by evidence of every kind that could be brought to bear on it. There shall be moral evidence, enough of it and to spare; and there shall be external, sensible evidence also, such as the eyes and ears of men shall comprehend, and nothing but a disease of the mind, hardness of heart, shall be able to resist. First comes the voice of prophecy, marking out the future Messiah as one on whom the Spirit of the Lord was to descend and rest; one who, at his entrance on his office, was to be anointed with the Spirit, just as earthly monarchs and priests were anointed with the holy

oil. True, this was a spiritual prophecy, conveying a meaning purely spiritual, and to be fulfilled mainly in a spiritual and consequently invisible manner; but "the heart of men was waxed gross," they were lost to spiritual ideas, and it was the will of God that their outward senses should witness the accomplishment of his words. Accordingly, at the baptism of the Saviour, he condescends to make himself an object of sense. He speaks from heaven in a voice that can be heard, and descends from heaven in a form that can be seen. The eternal Spirit puts on a bodily shape like a dove, and resting, in the sight of the astonished multitude, on the head of Jesus, marks him out as the predicted and consecrated Messiah.

And while fulfilling one prophecy, the great Jehovah seems to bear in mind another ancient declaration of his lips. "Behold," said he by Isaiah, "my servant whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my Spirit upon him." This Spirit comes down on this chosen servant; and what is the language of Jehovah now? It echoes his language by his prophet; "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." Besides, in all this there was a special reference to John himself. It appears that though born of the same family as our Lord, his personal acquaintance with him was slight, or

none at all. "I knew him not," says he. He knew his pretensions, but not his person. And this was wisely ordered; it took away the appearance of contrivance and collusion. But one consequence of it was, John's own mind stood in some degree of doubt as to the identity of Jesus; he was not sure that he was actually that son of Mary, who had been born thirty years before at Bethlehem. His doubts therefore must be removed; and this miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit served to remove them. It was the very sign promised to him before it occurred. "He that sent me to baptize with water," says he, "the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."

3. But this event establishes another point. While it proves the reality of our Lord's Messiahship, it declares *his qualifications for the discharge of this office.*

We know what the Messiah was to accomplish. It was more than instructing, and moralizing, and amending, the world; he came to take out a people from among its suffering inhabitants, and make them exalted and happy as the angels of God. Now before this great end can be effected, we feel at once that an atonement for our sins, an

expiation for our guilt, though necessary for us, is but a part of what we need. There is something wrong within us; something that stands in the way of all true honour and happiness; something that mars even our earthly comforts, and totally incapacitates the soul for heavenly pursuits and joys. We feel that some great change must take place within us; that the disorder of our nature must be rectified, the diseases of our spirits healed, old feelings and workings checked, propensities the strongest the soul knows, rooted out, and new desires implanted. The man of the world may be satisfied with his worldly heart, with its grovelling affections and sordid lusts; but we know, for God has taught it us, that a heart like this will never do for a heavenly region. And yet we are paralyzed. We cannot rid ourselves of this disordered mind: we are unable to attain a holy and heavenly nature. It is natural therefore for us to ask, "Can this Saviour help us? We know that he has silenced the thunders of the law, for in his own suffering body and agonized soul he has endured its curse; but can he cleanse these vile hearts of ours from their base corruptions, and give us the light, and the strength, and the purity, and the blessedness, we need?" This scripture assures us that he can. The Spirit descended on him in Jordan, to qualify him for what we may call the moral part of his great

work ; to enable him to reach the mind of man, and influence and rule it. He himself tells us so. Led by the Spirit he had received, he first goes into the wilderness to have his own faith and obedience put to the test ; and when he had been taught there, by his own experience, what this Spirit could do for the suffering and tempted, he begins his public ministry at Nazareth by declaring the qualifications bestowed on him for the discharge of his office. "The Spirit of the Lord," says he, "is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor ; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind ; to set at liberty them that are bruised."

And this Spirit abode on him, and abides on him still. Saint Matthew informs us that the dove "rested," as well as descended, on him in Jordan ; and Saint Luke speaks of him as going up from the river into the wilderness, "full of the Holy Ghost." As God, he possessed the Spirit before ; as man also, he had been from the hour of his birth under his enlightening and upholding influence ; but now at his baptism, he comes down on him in all his fulness as the Head of his church. His blessed gifts are made over to him, placed at his disposal ; and for this purpose, that he may communicate them to whomsoever he will ; that he may be able and authorized to baptize his

people with the Holy Ghost ; that, at this moment, we ourselves may lift up an imploring heart to him as he sits on his throne, and find light, and comfort, and strength, enter our souls.

4. We are taught also here *the high estimation in which the anointed Saviour is held by his Father* ; the complacency and delight with which he regards him. I allude not to him in his divine nature, as he existed before he trod the earth ; for this scripture makes perhaps no mention of him in this character. It points him out to us as one like unto ourselves, appearing among sinners in a sinner's form ; and then it bids us look on the opening heavens, it bids us listen to the voice that says, as it rends the skies, to this lowly Jesus, "Thou art my beloved Son ; in thee I am well pleased."

God is well pleased with his people ; "He taketh pleasure," we are told, "in them that fear him ;" he speaks of them as his elect, his delight, his jewels, his portion, his diadem, his glory ; and he does and says this because they are connected with his Son, the purchase of his blood and the redeemed of his grace ; because his own attributes and excellencies are reflected in them. What then must be his joy in that Son himself ? in him from whom his people derive all in them that is glorious ? in him who is the great manifestation of God to his wondering creatures ; whom he

himself calls by the Holy Ghost, "the brightness of his own glory, and the express image of his person." Much joy flows sometimes from the poor love that is found on earth; more still from the love of heaven; but what must that joy be which flows into the infinite mind of Jehovah from such love as he can feel to such a Son! And then comes this thought cheering and elevating to the Christian's heart—A portion of that joy will soon be mine. My God will one day say to me, "Enter thou into my joy."

From a review of this history we learn, first, *the importance which God attaches to his own ordinances*; the honour he puts on them. The dwelling place of Jehovah is opened, a symbol of the divine majesty becomes visible to mortal eyes, the Spirit descends embodied on Christ, a voice from the throne of heaven is heard on earth declaring his greatness; and when? Not while he was performing his wonderful works; treading the waters, ruling the winds, healing the sick, or raising the dead; but while he was baptized in Jordan; while, as dependent and needy, he was looking upward in prayer.

We may despise ordinances, brethren; we may make light of sacraments; we may live and we may die without ever knowing what real prayer means; but the things that we condemn, are valued

in heaven. He who came down from heaven, lived in the practice of them. All the external honour he ever obtained while on earth from the world he had left, they procured for him. Never by power or by might did he bring it down. Thrice the voice of his Father proclaimed him blessed, but it was prayer that pierced his Father's abode. He never called his own holy Son beloved, except when he beheld him a suppliant at his feet.

We see here also *the insufficiency of ordinances*. Baptism, though administered by a prophet and received by Christ, was powerless; or if it had any efficacy, that efficacy was limited; it evidently left much undone. It could not reach the soul of Jesus; it did not qualify him for his mediatorial work. To accomplish these ends, the Holy Ghost must come down from on high, must abide and rest on him.

What then do men mean, when they contend that the mere sprinkling of water can reach our earthly minds and regenerate us? What then do some of you mean by looking to sacraments, and prayers, and sermons, for acceptance with God and salvation? Brethren, all the water in all the rivers on the earth, consecrated and blessed by all the prophets and ministers the earth ever bore, could not wash away from your souls the stain of one transgression; they could not subdue within your

hearts one evil passion; they could not implant there one holy thought. Experience tells us how weak sermons and sacraments often are. The emptiest tale that was ever told, could not affect us less than they at times affect some of us, nor weary us more. As for prayer, it is omnipotent; but not that prayer which goes up mingled with the workings of self-sufficiency, which looks to itself for its power, and depends on the merit which offers it, for its reward. The same Spirit who excites prayer, must give prayer its efficacy. It is the Spirit accompanying ordinances and working by them, that makes ordinances blessings. Without this Spirit, we are far away from the light of God's countenance; his pure mind abhors us. With this Spirit subduing and cleansing us, we are, like our great Head, the beloved and delight of Jehovah. He esteems us the noblest workmanship of his hands. He rejoices more in one sanctified soul than in any other creature in the wide universe he has built.

We may infer too from this transaction, *the importance of our Lord's atonement*. As the Representative and Head of his church, he was baptized with water; in the same character, he was anointed with the Spirit; but his church is not yet redeemed, scarcely a step has yet been taken towards its redemption. Much more must be endured and accomplished before one lost soul

can be rescued, or one sin forgiven. There was another baptism that Christ was to be baptized with, a baptism in blood. We were not redeemed by the water of a flowing river, or by a descending Spirit ; but “by the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.”

Brethren, on what are your hopes fixed ? On any thing done by you or wrought within you ? Then ask yourselves why a baptized and heaven-anointed Jesus died at Jerusalem ; and dash your hopes to the ground.

SERMON VI.

THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN OF THE EAST TO CHRIST.

ST. MATTHEW ii. 9.

And, lo, the star which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

THE sacred historian appears to record this circumstance with a feeling of admiration, if not of wonder. And perhaps the interest which the whole of this narrative possesses, may be traced, in a great measure, to the mystery which hangs over it. It rivets our attention because it excites our curiosity. But it was not written for such a purpose. There is instruction in it, and instruction designed by the Holy Spirit for every one of us. May he give us grace to discover and receive it !

We may divide the history into three parts ;— the description it gives us of the men who are the subjects of it, the star which appeared to them, and the conduct they manifested.

I. *The description afforded us of these visitants at Bethlehem*, is very short. All we are told is, that they were “ wise men from the east.”

By “ the east,” the people of Judæa would understand either Arabia or Persia ; and by “ wise men,” not merely persons of well informed, sound understandings, but men who made learning their pursuit and science their profession. The quarter they came from, leads us to suppose that they were astronomers, and their immediate discovery of the miraculous star goes far to confirm this opinion. That they were men of some wealth, is clear from the gifts they brought with them, while the sensation they excited in Jerusalem, is a proof, if not of their elevated rank, yet at least of the widely spread and high estimation in which they were held. Herod seeks a private interview with them ; the sanhedrim is called together to answer their enquiries ; so much importance is attached to their words, that all the city is thrown by them into a state of alarm. The king trembles for the safety of his throne, and the people are apprehensive of new commotions and oppressions. Bringing all these circumstances together, we may infer

that they were learned men, rich men, perhaps great men.

1. See then in this narrative, first, *the power of God over the human mind.*

At this period, he was about to introduce into the world a new revelation of himself; and this revelation was intended to manifest his perfections more gloriously than they had ever been manifested before, and, at the same time, to put into man the deepest feeling of self-abasement of which his proud nature is capable. "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled," says God as he forms the scheme of man's redemption, "and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." In furtherance of this design, he determines to pass by, in a marked manner, all that the world admires; and to take as the special objects of his favour, those whom the world most contemns, the poor, the ignorant, the mean. "Not many wise men after the flesh," says the apostle, "not many mighty, not many noble are called;"—and then he states the reason; "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that

are ;”—and all, he tells us, for these two ends, first, “that no flesh should glory in his presence,” and then that “he that glorieth, should glory in the Lord.”

But this procedure was evidently open to one objection—the divine intention in it might be overlooked ; men might ascribe the power of the gospel, not to the sovereign agency of Jehovah, but to the weakness of those who embraced it ; and thus the outward meanness of the church, instead of confounding human pride, might serve only to tarnish its Redeemer’s glory. And how does an all-wise God act ? He first brings to the birth-place of his Son a company of humble shepherds, and bids us mark well that of such, in the main, shall be his kingdom ; but then to let us see that he can go where he will for trophies of his greatness, that he can bow down the rich and noble yet lower than he lays the poor, that he can triumph over the pride of intellect, the love of fame, the dread of scorn, as easily and completely as he triumphs over the dulness of ignorance and the sordid apathy of want ; he leads these wise men from the east to Jerusalem ;—and, observe, not as he led the shepherds from their folds, by messengers sent down from heaven, but by a far less commanding guide, a glimmering star.

And mark another difference which he puts between these honoured sages and these lowly

peasants. The latter stand erect in the Redeemer's presence. The design of their visit calls for no outward prostration from them ; they come to him as a Saviour, to manifest his goodness, not his power. The others must shew forth his subduing, resistless strength ; they are brought to him as a King ; and they are accordingly made to fall down in his lowly dwelling, and do him reverence.

What an encouragement, brethren, is here for every soul that feels its pride and hates its haughtiness ! There is a Being who can make me humble as an angel ; One who can master this proud, ungovernable heart of mine. And this Being is calling me to his feet. If I am in earnest in my prayers for an humble heart, I shall go to him, and beseech him to shew forth in me also his abasing power.

2. We have too in this history, *a fulfilment of prophecy.*

The predictions which announced the coming of the Messiah, foretold of him that he should beat down the partition wall which had so long excluded the Gentiles from the church of God. He was to be the Shiloh unto whom should be "the gathering of the people ;" the seed of Abraham, "in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed." "Ask of me," said God to him, "and I shall give thee the heathen for thine in-

heritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." And no sooner does he appear in the world, than God seems impatient to fulfil his promise. The angel who publishes to the shepherds the tidings of his birth, is commanded to declare that they shall be tidings of great joy "to all people;" and then comes a confirmation of this saying in these worshipping and rejoicing Gentiles.

The Messiah came first to his own, "but his own received him not." "The daughter of Zion" was called on to exult at his approach, but she manifested no joy when she saw him, and "the daughter of Jerusalem" was troubled. God leaves them to their folly; but, in the greatness of his strength, he lays bare his arm, and a company of heralds is brought out of heathen lands to proclaim the King of Zion in Zion's streets. "Behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

And the matter did not end here. After a while, these men are shewn to us bowing down at Bethlehem to the very King whom Jerusalem rejected; worshipping that Messiah whom the people that had for ages professed to look for him, were either afraid or ashamed to own.

In this situation, they were at once witnesses

against unbelieving Israel, and proofs to the Gentile world of the divine faithfulness. They were intimations and pledges of the divine purposes. They were tokens of the ability of Jehovah to make the kingdoms of the earth his own. As such we must still regard them. Looking on them at the Redeemer's feet, we must cease to talk of difficulties in the career of a mighty God; we must cease to be discouraged at the slow progress of his gospel in our world. They were the first fruits of a harvest which from eternity he determined to gather in; he is gathering it in, and the day is coming, when the whole earth shall be one vast field of joy and glory. Unbelief may say of this great change, "It is incredible." Carnal wisdom, as she looks at the darkness which covers the earth, may pronounce it impossible. But what then? While these men were worshipping at Bethlehem, the Jews might have said the same of heathen Britain, and said it with more of the sanction of experience and more of the colour of truth. But what says history and what says fact now? "The Gentiles have come to thy light, O blessed Saviour, and our once heathen kings to the brightness of thy rising." The Holy One of Israel has been honoured in England, as he never perhaps was honoured in his chosen Zion; and soon all "the kingdoms of the world" shall become his kingdoms and the kingdoms of his Christ.

Is all this nothing to you, brethren? Has this prospect no power to excite within you one feeling of delight or one rising of prayer? Then where is your faith in the only book which brings "life and immortality to light?" and where is your love for the only Being in the universe, to whom you can look for the rescue of your lost soul?

II. We come now to our next point—*the star which conducted these wise men to Christ.*

What this star was, we are not told. It could not be any one of the known heavenly bodies, for it at once attracted notice as something strange; nor can we suppose that it was any new world introduced into our system. It was probably a meteor in the earth's own atmosphere, assuming the appearance of a planet.

We are kept in the same ignorance as to the mode in which these sages connected this celestial appearance with Christ. They call it "his star," and they evidently act under a full conviction that it proclaimed his birth; but whence came the knowledge which led to this conviction? It has been supposed that the Jewish expectation of the Messiah had reached them among the mountains of the east, carried thither by some of the dispersed Israelites; and that they had become familiar, by the same means, with the prophecies which foretold his advent. One of these

spoke of him under the image of a star, and, at the same time, represented him as a King; and it is further remarkable that this had for its author a prophet who himself had an eastern origin. "There shall come a star out of Jacob," said Balaam, "and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel." But a prophecy like this, supposing them to be ever so well acquainted with it, could hardly produce in men like these a conviction so strong as we see them manifesting. There is no indication of doubt or conjecture in their language: all they say bespeaks knowledge, certainty, assurance.

None but God, brethren, can lead a sinner to the Lord Jesus. Means he may employ, but whether they are stars, or prophecies, or ministers, he will so employ them, as to make us feel their insufficiency, and look through them to himself. In this case, he bids a shining meteor testify in the east of his Son; and then undoubtedly he himself, by his Spirit, explains its language. He darts into the minds of these happy men a brighter light than ever flowed from any created thing, tells them of the Sun of righteousness, and then leads them by a faint emblem of him to his presence.

1. Assuming that they were astronomers, we perceive, first, in this miraculous guide, *the condescension of God*. We learn that *he often meets man in man's own paths*.

It was the ordinary employment of these philosophers to contemplate the heavens. This was the work assigned them by Providence, and expected from them by their fellow-men. In this employment, the Lord Jehovah reveals to them a Saviour.

And herein he acted only in conformity with his usual ways. David was taken from the sheepfold to be anointed king. Gideon was in his father's barn, when he was called to deliver Israel. "According to the custom of his office," Zacharias was burning incense in the temple, when the angel of the Lord promised him joy and gladness in a son; and when the multitude of the heavenly host sung of a new-born Saviour, none on earth heard them save shepherds who were "keeping watch over their flocks by night." Matthew was called from "the receipt of custom" to follow Christ, and the fishermen Peter, and James, and John, were casting a net into the sea, when our Lord called them to be "fishers of men." The inference we draw is this—we need not go out of our station to seek God; we need not lay aside the ordinary duties of life to find God; we need not strike out into new and unusual paths in order to honour him.

We are all tempted to think that we are not in our right place; that our souls would prosper more and the Redeemer be glorified by us more,

could we make some change in our situation, or disentangle ourselves from some of its sordid cares and duties. But are we where God placed us, and where God evidently keeps us? Are our employments honest? such as we may carry on without violating the divine law? Then, whatever our feelings may say, there is not on earth, no, nor in heaven, a situation where we could bring more glory to Jehovah, or draw out of Jehovah more abundant mercy. Were there such a spot, we should be on it in a moment. Though it lay at the utmost bounds of the creation, he whose "work is perfect," whose love to us is boundless, and whose ability to do us good is infinite, would at once find it out, and surround us with its advantages. But he says, "No. I will seek thee where I have placed thee, and there will I be found of thee. No distance, no cares, no turmoil, nor temptations, shall hide thee from me, or bar me out of thine heart. Thou shalt see me where thou lookest not for me. I will give thee vineyards in the wilderness and waters in the desert. Stand thou still, and see my salvation."

2. This star exhibits to us also *the greatness of God*. It says that *he often puts much honour on Christ by the means which he makes use of to lead sinners to him*.

In the first instance, like these wise men, we

are generally led to the Lord Jesus as an abased Saviour; as One sustaining a character which harmonizes much better with the manger and the cross, than with the crown or the throne. We look on him as the "despised and rejected" Son of man; the mind contemplates him as wounded and bruised, crucified and slain, "redeeming us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." But yet, in some way or other, the greatness of Christ generally bursts out amidst this degradation. No angel comes down from above to tell us that he is the Lord, no new star shines forth in the heavens to declare his glory; but God so orders the means of our conviction; employs such instruments to enlighten, convert, and subdue us; and makes his hand so visible in every part of that blessed work which he accomplishes by them in our hearts, that a man at noonday might as well doubt whether the sun has risen, as a sinner draw near to Jesus of Nazareth, and not see in him an honour that is divine. His glory and his Father's are displayed together; displayed, not merely by the grace they impart and the wonderful salvation they bestow, but as plainly, if not as brightly, by the means that have taught us our need of that grace, by the way a God of wisdom has chosen to make that salvation our own. Look at these philosophers amid their mountains of the east. A messenger from

Bethlehem might have brought them to Jesus; a report of his birth would have soon prostrated them at his feet; but no. The Son of the Highest is lying in a manger, the King of glory is despised on the earth he is born to save; the heavens above him therefore shall proclaim his majesty, inanimate nature shall bear witness to her Lord. At his Father's bidding, an unknown star places these Gentiles by his side, and testifies to an astonished world his hidden greatness.

3. Behold further here *the compassion and care of God. He adapts his guidance to our necessities.* He gives us no reason to look for extraordinary help, when the common means of grace are sufficient to lead us to him; but rather than suffer one humble soul to seek his face in vain, he will shake heaven and earth, he will come out of his place, to be its instructor and guide.

He had taught these learned men to expect a Saviour. No sooner does that Saviour appear in a distant land, than a miracle is wrought to make known to them his birth. His star shews itself to them in the east, does its errand, and then disappears. Judæa, it is obvious, had been pointed out before as the place of his nativity. To Jerusalem therefore, its chief city, they hurried. When there, they could learn from the priests and scribes where Christ was to be born. On this point, no divine instruction was needed; and accordingly

none was given. But when they had left Jerusalem, when they were on their way to Bethlehem, and might be unable to ascertain in that strange village the Saviour's dwelling, the star again shines forth, their welcome and almost exulting guide. "Lo," says the half-wondering historian, "the star which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was." And then he adds, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

And is this any thing more, Christian brethren, than an external representation of what has taken place, unseen by mortal eye, in our souls? There have been times in which the light that once shone so brightly on us from heaven, has disappeared. We have been perplexed in our way to God; content perhaps to go any where or do any thing at his command, but not knowing whither to go or what he would have us to do. And this darkness has not been for an hour. It has continued so long, that we have sometimes thought the light would never break on us again, that we should be left to go along a path of wretchedness to a world of unbroken despair. And how has all this ended? As our fears predicted? O no! We enquired for Christ; we sought him; the morning, as it rose, found us in prayer to him; the sun, as it set, left us thirsting

for his presence ; and where are we now ? Nearer to him perhaps than he ever drew us before ; almost where these happy Gentiles were, at his feet. The light that was sown for us, has sprung up ; he “ who sitteth between the cherubim,” has shone forth. The consequence is, our perplexities have all vanished ; the oppression that bore down our spirits, has vanished with them ; and instead of feverish anxieties and restless doubts, a peace has been given us, if not as sweet as the peace of heaven, yet so calm, so strengthening, so elevating, that let others deem it what they will, it is to us a pledge and a foretaste of eternal joys. It cannot be otherwise. We feel, as we experience it, Jehovah’s power and Jehovah’s faithfulness. He has brought us “ in a way that we knew not ;” he has led us “ in paths that we had not known ;” he has made “ darkness light before us, and crooked things straight ;” and we are as sure as though a voice from the skies proclaimed it to us, that he will never leave nor forsake us, that “ he will guide us by his counsel, and receive us to his glory.” We can say with exultation and confidence, and say it of him who rules in the highest heavens, “ This God is our God for ever and ever ; he will be our Guide even unto death.”

III. We have yet to notice, in the third place, *the conduct of these men.*

1. And the first point which calls for our attention here, is that which was the spring of all we admire in them—*their faith*.

We are often told that men of learning and science have peculiar difficulties to struggle with in their Christian course. The pride of the understanding, it is said, opposes itself to the humiliating doctrines of the cross, and habits of reasoning indispose and almost disqualify the mind for a simple exercise of faith. Be it so; it probably often is so. But what then? Is a corrupt mind a greater evil than a debased heart? Is a proud understanding harder to be subdued, than polluted affections to be cleansed? Are habits of thought more inveterate than habits of sin? And what if they were? Were all the pride that swells in every soul, heaped together into any one soul, an omnipotent God could beat it down in a moment; and, in another moment, "bring every thought" within that soul "into captivity to the obedience of Christ." He may find a difference between man and man, but when he leads men to his Son, he lays them all down alike before him, or sometimes he lays the highest and proudest the most low. Look at Paul, the learned, reasoning, strong-minded Paul. Not one of the fishermen of Galilee received the truth in greater simplicity than that man, or held it with a firmer grasp. His noble understanding became

the ally of his faith. It gave an extent to his view, an elevation to his glance, which often enabled him to see, where others could only believe. It had, it may be, its trials and dangers, but high indeed were its enjoyments and splendid its triumphs. And look at these philosophers of the east. Their faith was simple as the faith of a little child; and so strong, that nothing could shake it. When they came to Jerusalem, they undoubtedly expected to find the city resounding with acclamations at the birth of its King: but none of its people had even heard of his birth; and when they were told of it, they were troubled at the tidings. These Gentiles however stood firm. Not one doubt do they express of the fact of his advent; the only question they ask is, "Where is he?" And when they were actually in his presence, what a trial for their faith was there! With their eastern notions of royal magnificence, a king in a stable and a manger, or even in a peasant's hut, must have appeared to them an almost confounding spectacle; more startling, if not more marvellous, than his star in the skies. But it mattered not. They wondered perhaps, but yet they believed.

2. And notice *the moral greatness* they exhibited. There was a loftiness in their conduct, that elevation of judgment and feeling, about which the men of the world may talk, but which

none, save a man of God, can either possess or understand.

Behold them as they enter Jerusalem, enquiring in the presence of that tyrant Herod for another and a more rightful owner to the very throne he sat on; and avowing, among the reckless and perhaps scoffing people, their conviction of his advent, and their determination to honour him. "We have seen his star," said they, "and are come to worship him." That was the victory of faith over the fear of man; now behold its victory over worldly expectations and worldly prejudices. Mark how it penetrates through discouraging appearances, annihilates their influence, and gives to the winds long cherished feelings. These men of the east, the region of princely state and splendour, can see in a helpless infant an object of adoration, can bow down in a cottage to one whom they had expected to find admired in a palace, or worshipped on a throne.

Brethren, the things with which the faith of the heaven-taught Christian is conversant, are high things. Their greatness is a greatness of the noblest kind, a spiritual, a moral greatness; and they teach him to measure all he sees by a moral standard. They assimilate his mind to themselves. His taste becomes elevated. The tinsel of the world now appears to him as tinsel. He can look through it; he can despise it. He

can see the meanness which it often aims to hide, and admire the grandeur which the want of it cannot impair. If you wish to see man in his dignity, if you are enquiring for a soaring mind, a lofty spirit, or an expanded heart, you may find it even on this base earth ; but you must go for it, not to the stately mansion and the glittering palace, but to the Christian's home ; and to see it best, you must go there when the man seems stripped bare of all his greatness, when the hand of heaven is on him, and, like Job, he has nothing left him but his sorrow, his religion, and his God.

3. Observe one feature more in the conduct we are examining ;—*the devotedness of these men to Christ.*

They undoubtedly believed on him as the promised Messiah, and looked to him, in that character, for spiritual mercies ; but not one word appears in this history of any blessing they sought or expected at his hands. He is spoken of only as a King, and the sole object they profess to have in view in their journeyings and enquiries, is not, like that of the dying malefactor, that he may remember them in his kingdom, but that they may lie down in the dust before him, and honour him there. “ We are come ” said they, “ to worship him.” And they did not content themselves with an empty homage. They had brought with them to Bethlehem such gifts as the great men of

the east were accustomed to present to their monarchs, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh; and though they knew not how these could benefit him, they offered them to their infant Lord. And they appear to have rejoiced as they offered them. The tribute they rendered to him was evidently no cold, forced service of duty; it was the dictate of feeling, the natural expression of the thankfulness, and admiration, and love, which God had put in their hearts. Had the wealth of the whole world been theirs, they would have deemed themselves honoured to be allowed to cast it all at his feet.

Brethren, what know you of this devotedness? Referring to the days of the Gentile church, the psalmist says, "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts." Isaiah declares that when "they from Sheba shall come, they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord." The question then recurs, What gifts have you laid down before him? What praise have you rendered him? What honour have you done him? Say not that you are nothing, and can do nothing, and can give nothing. He well knows what you are, and yet he has condescended to ask a gift at your hands. He stands as a petitioner, almost as a suppliant, before you. He asks of you your

hearts, yourselves, all you have to bestow, your souls and bodies which are his. To profess to come to him and receive him, and yet to refuse him his own; to keep back from him every thing that the world will accept; to live regardless of his honour; to place ease, or reputation, or pleasure, or money, or any thing, above him in the heart; like the men of Jerusalem, to hear of an incarnate Saviour, and yet to be determined that he shall influence none of your actions and interfere with none of your pursuits:—these converted heathen shall rise up in the judgment, and condemn such a religion as this. They saw him only as a Babe of yesterday, but their costliest treasures were his: we profess to look on him as a King in his glory, clothed with light as a garment, and ruling heaven and earth by his word; and yet all the service and gifts that we offer him, are the refuse of a harassing world, the very dregs of our affections, the fragments of our thoughts and time. This is not Christianity. It is a pretence, a delusion. I will not say, it mocks God; it mocks and is ruining you. O that you were enlightened to discover its true character! You would start at its hollowness. Like the stricken Paul, you would tremble and be astonished. O for a religion like that of these converted heathen! a religion which leads through every obstacle to Christ, rejoices with exceeding

joy as it finds him, lies down in conscious abasement at his feet, is elevated almost to heaven by a sight of his hidden majesty and love, and finds its chief joy and its noblest honour in its efforts to give the King of glory his own.

SERMON VII.

THE COMPLAINT OF ST. PAUL.

ROMANS vii. 24.

*O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me
from the body of this death ?*

WE are all familiar with the language of complaint. We hear it wherever we go. Scarcely a day passes, in which it does not proceed from our own lips. But how little do we think of the sin that we are guilty of in our complaints ! Could we see them in their real character, we should number many of them among our greatest follies and heaviest crimes. What earthliness of mind do they often manifest ! what shameful distrust of a faithful God ! what ignorance, and pride, and self-will, and daring rebellion ! Here however in this text, is a holy and blessed complaint. Happy would it be for us all, if every

other were silenced among us ; if no lamentation were ever heard in our houses and chambers, save this alone !

It suggests three particulars for our consideration ;—first, the person who makes it ; secondly, the evil he deplors in it ; and, thirdly, the effects which this evil produced on him.

I. “ Of whom then,” we may ask in the first instance, “ speaketh the apostle this ? Of himself, or of some other man ? ” “ Not of himself,” some will tell us, “ nor of any sincere Christian. He is speaking in the person of a sinner whom God has compelled to feel the burden of his transgressions and the evil of his nature, but in whose mind the love of sin still reigns. We are to regard his words as a complaint extorted, in an hour of thoughtfulness, from a man of an enlightened conscience with an ungodly heart.” But a single glance at the preceding part of the chapter confutes this interpretation. Whoever he may be that is speaking in it, he says in one place, “ I would do good ; ” in another, “ I delight in the law of God ; ” and surely these are expressions that never yet came with truth from unhallowed lips, that never could come from any but a renewed heart. Besides, this complaint itself marks the character of him who uttered it. It designates one hating sin in a very extra-

ordinary degree, and striving against it with every power of his soul; and Paul himself was a man of this class. We infer therefore that the apostle is describing his own feelings in this passage, and consequently right feelings, exactly those feelings which, in a world like this, we should expect to find at work in a partially renewed mind.

And we must not attempt to turn away the force of his language by referring it to some early period of his life, or some former stage of his Christian experience. He evidently alludes to an evil that was distressing him at the time he wrote. It is not Saul, the persecutor, who sends forth this cry of wretchedness; not Saul on the ground in the road to Damascus; no, nor yet Saul listening in his blindness to the teaching of Ananias;—it is Paul, the servant of Jesus Christ; Paul, the chosen and beloved apostle; Paul, the champion, and bulwark, and glory, of the whole Christian church.

And he speaks here not merely as a Christian, but as a very-experienced Christian; as one arrived at a state of rare maturity in grace, a state in which sin appears to the mind, as it appears to the divine mind, an evil, an intolerable evil, a thing so hateful, that the very remains of it are not to be endured; they must be got rid of, at all events, they must be controlled and counter-acted, or the heart will break.

And the holiest amongst you, brethren, will be the most willing to take this view of the text, and never so ready to look at it in this light, as in your holiest hours. You read here nothing that surprises you. On the contrary, you deem these words some of the plainest and most natural the Bible contains. If you must wonder at all, you only wonder that any moment should ever go over any one man, in which he is not taking them as his own.

We see then already one use that we are to make of this complaint. It is laid before us as a touchstone whereby we may try the reality of our own personal religion, and a standard by which we may measure its extent.

II. Our next subject of enquiry is the ground of it, *the evil it deplors*.

This undoubtedly is sin, and sin apart from any punishment the apostle either felt on account of it, or dreaded. He does not cry out like a criminal tortured on the rack to which his crimes have brought him; he does not say with Cain, "My punishment is greater than I can bear;" nor with the rich man in the parable, "I am tormented in this flame." It is sin itself that grieves him.

Nor again, like the suffering David, is he bewailing some enormous transgression that had

exposed him to shame, and weakened his trust in the divine mercy. The man's life was blameless. It was so upright and consistent, that the Holy Spirit has not recorded of him, from the day of his conversion to the hour of his death, one mistake or crime.

And herein lies the peculiarity of his language—he complains of sin as sin; of sin that he knew to be pardoned; of sin too within him; of that which no eye saw, but the workings of which his soul deeply felt. He mourns over inward corruption, the loathsome and intolerable iniquity of the heart.

“And did this exist,” it may be asked, “in the holy Paul?” It did, brethren, and there is not a single heart out of heaven, in which it does not exist; there is not a godly heart out of heaven, in which it is not felt. Men talk of perfection, talk of it with their feet on this vile earth and breathing its tainted air; but poor indeed are such men's views of holiness, and dark indeed their knowledge of their God. Their perfection is a dream of ignorance. It is nothing better than a blind man's landscape, or a deaf man's song.

The apostle calls this inward corruption by various names. It is sometimes “the law of sin;” at other times, “the body of sin;” here it is “a body of death.” He terms it “a body,” to

give us an idea of the magnitude of the evil, the strength and extent of its influence ; and he speaks of it as "a body of death," because, in its tendency, it leads to death, and when allowed its full scope, it ends in death. He intimates, in this expression, what Saint James plainly asserts, that "when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin ; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." We are reminded here of nothing less than this awful fact, that every one of us is carrying about in his breast that which can destroy him. There are still in the holiest heart, the elements, not of mischief only, but of utter ruin, the seeds of total and irretrievable misery.

And even when checked, this evil principle still shews its mortal tendency. It often paralyzes even the renewed soul. It chills within it that divine life which God himself has implanted, suspending or clogging its operations, and marring its enjoyments. No elevation of character can lift us above its reach, no heavenly wisdom can always baffle its assaults, no attainments in holiness can neutralize its power. The heart which has been chosen, and consecrated, and long dwelt in, as the temple of God ; the heart bearing the image of Jehovah, and well nigh meet for his kingdom ; the heart warm with the love of heaven and expanding with a foretaste of its joys ; even such a heart as this, an evil within can sometimes

half wither, and make it, through many a mournful hour, in its feelings, and affections, and almost all its workings, like the heart that has never once felt the regenerating hand of God, that has Satan still for its master and his misery for its end.

The operations of this remaining depravity are manifold and unceasing. We cannot look into our minds without tracing them.

It discovers itself in *evil thoughts*. These the Christian hates ; he would bar them out for ever from his soul ; yet they come, come almost every hour, come in crowds, and never perhaps in crowds so great, as when he wishes them the farthest from him. Some of them undoubtedly come from without ; they must be traced to Satan ; but most of them are inborn. They arise naturally and spontaneously within us, just as noxious weeds spring up in their native climate and parent soil.

And then how many and how strong are *the evil desires* which spring out of these evil thoughts ! They are not fostered in the believer's mind ; he abhors them ; it is the business of his life to subdue them and root them up ; but where is the man, however elevated in spirit, whom they do not infest ? And how can it be otherwise ? With a void ever aching within us ; with capabilities of happiness never yet satisfied ; surrounded, at the same time, by objects congenial to our earth-born nature, adapted to its propensities and offering to

gratify them ; with every sense an open inlet to temptation, and every appetite and passion ready to welcome it ; carrying about with us a hungry soul in a world crowded with that which looks like food and at which all around us are seen greedily catching, while the real materials of its happiness are at a distance from it, out of its sight, and, as feeling often tells us, out of its reach ;—is it wonderful, brethren, that, in such a situation, our hearts sometimes go wrong ? Is it wonderful that the desires we would raise up to heaven, often cleave to the dust ? Is it not rather wonderful that we are able at any time to rise above the allurements that surround us ; and more than this, to give the warmest and strongest of our longings to an unseen God ?

And think too of *the evil tempers* that still assail us—envy, anger, jealousy, party-spirit, and many more. We ought long since to have done with these vile feelings, and there are moments when we are ready to think them clean gone from us for ever, but, before we are aware, they rise again into action, and amaze and confound us by their strength. How often and how painfully have some of us felt their influence ! We have gone into the society of our fellow-men calm and cheerful, with the law of love on our tongue and no emotion opposed to it in our heart ; but how have we left it ? Humbled and ashamed.

Some evil temper has been set at work, and destroyed at once every kind and every peaceful feeling. It has occasioned a tumult within us, which we have hardly known how to conceal or bear. We have returned to our homes disgusted with the world, and still more disgusted with ourselves; ready to wish for a solitude where no human being shall ever again be found to excite our corruptions, or be the spectator of our weakness. And what has caused this change? The veriest trifle; a word or look, the absence of a word or look; a provocation so minute, that we could scarcely define it; a thing so contemptible, that we despise ourselves for giving it a feeling or a thought.

There is yet another way in which our corruption works—*it hinders much of the good we aim at; and the good which it cannot hinder, it pollutes.*

When our hearts begin to warm with the love of Christ, and new purposes are formed of more entire devotedness to his blessed service, it opposes sloth to feeling; it calls up selfishness to reason down our plans of mercy; it throws a chill over the kindling affections; and, instead of the career of zeal and usefulness we had marked out for ourselves, we once again lie down and take our rest in the torpor of a shameful ease.

And then when we are actually at work for God, think of the unworthy motives that are

generally at work also. How often are we aiming only at earthly honour and applause! and how more often still are we wishing to share with the Lord Jehovah in the honour that is his alone!

And go with us into our chambers. O the sin that besets us there! We dare not cease to pray; we know that death would follow madness like that; but what are our prayers? Many of them as trifling and heartless, as though the living God were an idol, or we needed no longer either his help or his mercy. There are times when we cannot pray. Our bewildered minds refuse their office. Our thoughts wander to the ends of the earth. The hour that we hoped would be spent in communion with heaven, is passed in nothingness, or in that which is worse. "When I would do good," says the apostle, "evil is present with me," and there is not a servant of Christ among us all, who does not, every time he aims to seek God or serve God, feel it, in a greater or less degree, to be present with him.

III. Let us pass on now to a third point—*the effects produced on Saint Paul by the inward pollution he bewails.*

He mentions two of these.

1. *It made him wretched.* And nothing else could produce this effect in that man. He suffered more in his Master's cause than any before or

any after him, and yet not a complaint or sigh could his sufferings wring from him. Of poverty and want, of toil and peril, of contempt and persecution, he said, "None of these things move me;" nay, he tells us that he actually "took pleasure" in these things, he gloried and exulted in them, because they were laid upon him for Christ's sake. But now look at this heroic sufferer. He is groaning with misery. Sin has done what neither scourgings, nor imprisonments, nor stonings, nor shipwrecks, ever could do—it has beaten him down. He cannot bear it. The least remains of it are a burden too heavy for him to stand under; they goad him even to impatience.

The most obvious sense we can put on his words carries us thus far, but it is generally supposed that the idea of misery is conveyed in this text in a yet stronger manner. It was the dreadful practice, we are told, of some ancient tyrants, to punish any unfortunate object of their displeasure by binding to him the lifeless body of a fellow-creature, a dead carcase to a living man; and then compelling him to bear it about with him to his constant horror and wretchedness. To a situation like this, Saint Paul is thought, in this passage, to compare his own. He feels himself, while burdened with sin, like an unhappy captive carrying about a loathsome and intolerable weight, and exclaims in the anguish of his

tortured spirit, "O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?"

And similar to this is the light in which every real believer looks on sin. He regards it as a detestable object. It pains and distresses him. Nothing distresses him like it. It is the one main sorrow of his life. Take this away from him, and then place him where you may, and heap on him what you will, he is a happy man. "How great then," it may be said, "is the difference between him and others !" Brethren, it is great, far greater and far more extensive than many of you conceive ; but in no respect is it so marked as in this, in the griefs of the Christian, in the objects over which he most bitterly mourns.

Look around this congregation. We are all more or less the children of sorrow. There is not one of us, who has not within him some known or secret cause of disquietude. Now bring a messenger from heaven, and let him ask each one of us what sorrow he shall take from us, what spring of grief in our breasts he shall close, how various, could we speak out, would be our answers ! But yet there are men here, who would cry aloud with one voice for one evil to be removed. That evil would be sin, and among those men, however few in number, would every one of us be found, who is on his way to heaven. Would we really know whither we are going ?

Would we know, without self-delusion or mistake, our character in the sight of God? Then let each one of us ask himself, What makes me most wretched? What do I deem the greatest affliction of my life? Over what during the last week, or month, or year, have I most frequently and heavily mourned? Is it sickness, pain, or poverty? Is it the loss of this friend or that child? Is it my baffled schemes and blighted prospects? Is it mortified vanity, or disappointed hope, or wounded, or thwarted, or stifled affection? Or is it Saint Paul's great sorrow? Is it the Christian's affliction—sin? the sin of my heart, the pollution of my soul?

2. And this sorrow in the mind of the apostle, was not a mere feeling, a sentimental grief that he took a pleasure and almost a pride in indulging. The evil he deplored *compelled him to look about for deliverance from it.*

When he was unjustly imprisoned by the magistrates at Philippi, we find him in no haste to be released from his fetters. "They have sent to let you go," said the keeper of the prison to him, "now therefore depart, and go in peace." "Nay verily," answered he, "they have beaten us openly uncondemned, and have cast us into prison, and now do they thrust us out privily? Let them come themselves and fetch us out." But from his indwelling corruptions, he was impatient to

be released. Here there is no waiting, no standing on form, no indifference. Like a wretched prisoner who is panting in his dungeon for the air and the light, he cries aloud, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?"

It is evident at once, that this effort to get free from sin is no common thing. Nothing is more remote from the ordinary workings of our nature. Even in cases where the pollution of the heart is admitted as a fact, and professed to be deplored as a mournful evil, it is not always nor generally that this struggle for deliverance follows. On the contrary, a very different effect is often manifested. The ungodly man takes courage in sin from the very consideration of his sinfulness. He makes use of his corruption as an opiate to his fears. "I am frail," he says; "I carry about with me a weak and fallen nature. The God who will be my Judge, knows my weakness, and will make allowances for it. He will not punish severely those delinquencies to which such a nature as mine must be liable; he will never call me to a strict account for the sins into which I am thus instinctively and, as I feel, irresistibly led!" Poor, miserable sophistry! but not too miserable to be heard and echoed every day in this foolish world. It finds an excuse for guilt in the magnitude of guilt. It pleads the baseness of the heart as an excuse for the criminality of

the life. "There is poison in the fountain," it says. "If I did not put it there, I will foster it there, and pour in more. Not an atom of it shall be taken away. And then who can lay to my charge the poison in the streams?"

And take another man, or take any man whom God the Holy Ghost has not renewed. Tell him, brethren, that you will remove from him all that is evil; that you will deprive him of every pursuit, and amusement, and feeling, which has what the Bible calls sin mixed up with it; that you will leave him going about the world pure as an angel. Does he thank you? No. He feels that you are threatening to rob him of his all. There is not a thought of happiness within him, there is not a pleasure he enjoys or hopes for, there is not a vision of delight he cherishes, which sin does not gild and brighten; not one which can be separated from sin without being marred. He has a depraved nature, and in nothing but that which is congenial to his nature, which has more or less of depravity mingled with it, can he delight.

But turn to the man of God. He has a new nature, and this new nature is like the Being from whom it comes, holy, and heavenly, and divine. It consequently delights in things assimilated to itself, in holy things. And in proportion as it delights in these, it finds sin opposed to

its happiness. It is unsuited to its taste ; it stands in the way of its operations and gratifications ; it fetters, and depresses, and pains it. The consequence is, the soul most anxiously wishes to have done with the accursed thing ; and this wish gradually gains such strength, that it becomes at last one of its most constant and powerful feelings. It sighs for freedom as it never sighed for any thing else. It longs for deliverance from sin as much as from hell itself. In its estimation, sin is hell, and wherever sin is, " There," it says, " are all the elements of all misery." Open wide the door of heaven to a man of this stamp, tell him that he may be admitted into its regions of glory with all his evil desires and passions raging within him, could you silence, brethren, that man's cry ? could you stop that man's prayer for deliverance ? Not for one moment. He would still exclaim, " O wretched man that I am !" He would still ask, " Who shall deliver me ?" His language would still be, " When shall this desperately wicked heart be cleansed ? When shall these vile abominations cease to vex me ? How long must I bear this loathsome, intolerable burden ? I am in a holy world, but O for some world that will make me holy ! This bright heaven serves only to shew me more of my base pollution, and to aggravate my misery. O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee

away, flee away to any world or any scene where I might escape from my hated lusts, where I might find holiness, and be at rest !”

From this strong desire after holiness, arises much of that peculiarity of character which marks the Christian. It separates him from the world. It must do so, for it is an evil world. It makes him a man of self-denial, watchfulness, and prayer. His religion ceases to be a round of forms, or a set of opinions, or a code of decencies ; it takes the character of a warfare. There is an unceasing conflict kept up within him between his propensities and his duty, between sin and grace ; more than a desire for victory over his lusts, more than a stinging and struggling of his conscience after the indulgence of them ; there is a prevailing effort to be holy ; there is a daily “keeping under of the body,” a daily “crucifixion of the flesh,” a daily “walking in the Spirit.” And this goes on to the man’s dying hour. It ends only with his life.

Brethren, what know we of this spiritual conflict ? Has it ever been begun in us ? Is it going on now in our breasts ?

We have thus far followed the apostle ; and if we have not misinterpreted his words, it is clear from them, that *there is something in the nature of sin inconceivably dreadful.*

I allude not to the hold it has on the human mind, the firmness with which it strikes its roots into it and the resistance it offers to every attempt to dislodge it, though, in this view, we can hardly contemplate it without a shudder. I refer to the power it possesses of inflicting misery. Weakened, counteracted, subdued, it yet threw the holy Paul into an agony, it made him groan with wretchedness. And it did this while he was abounding in faith, and hope, and the Holy Ghost, and on his way to heaven. What then will it do with some of us? If thus powerful and tormenting in its weakness, what must it be in its strength? If thus dreadful while in a holy heart in a world of mercy, O what unutterable anguish will it inflict on every other heart in its own world, a world of wrath! God will leave it alone there. It will have the mastery over the whole soul, with nothing to resist its power, or tolerate its misery, or put an end to its existence. We tremble at the thought of the "devouring fire," we shudder at the never dying worm; that worm is sin, that fire is the love of sin, matured, triumphant, free.

We learn also here, that *the salvation of a sinner is an act of pure goodness.*

Throughout this epistle, Saint Paul has been labouring to establish this point. He has shewn that the righteousness which justifies, must be a perfect righteousness, and that man, having no

such righteousness to plead before God, must be justified altogether by grace, or not at all. And now what a convincing close to his reasoning does he give us! He brings himself before us; he lays himself bare; he lets us into the secrets of his own mind. And what do we see in him? A warfare that almost breaks his heart; sin not only tempting him from without, but dwelling in him, adhering to his inmost soul. A perfect righteousness? O no!--an evil that he deplores as he deplores nothing else. And when he begins to praise, for what do we hear him bless his God? As a sinner for a Saviour. He finds in Christ Jesus his only solace and joy. Brethren, if at the close of an eventful life, after all his faithful labours, and painful sacrifices, and splendid services, this apostle could find no hope of salvation, no rest for his soul, but in the free grace of a pardoning God, of what possible avail can our fancied righteousness prove to any of us? This text blasts at once all the expectations we have grounded on it, all our lofty hopes. It tears them up by the roots, and as we strive to throw them from us, it makes us ashamed of the folly that ever cherished them.

We infer again that *the life of a Christian must necessarily be a chequered life.*

Some of us perhaps look on it, so far at least as religion influences it, as a life of unbroken sorrow; others regard it as one unvarying scene

of peace and joy. It is neither. Our mistake arises from taking a partial view of it, or rather from our inability to comprehend the mysterious way in which its joys and its sorrows, its complaints and its songs, are blended with each other. They appear inconsistent. Nothing but a heart-felt experience of the power of godliness can cause them to appear otherwise. But look at this apostle. He mingles together, we see, his sorrows and his joys. One moment he cries, "O wretched man that I am!" the next, he breaks off from the language of bewailing, and gives utterance to feelings of a directly opposite character; "I thank God," he says, "through Jesus Christ our Lord." He complains of himself, and he rejoices in Christ, almost at the same instant. He is comforted in the very midst of his wretchedness. Nay, in one sense, he owes his comfort to his wretchedness. It sends him to his God. It brings him near that blessed Comforter, in whom is treasured up a suitable, and ready, and full relief for all his sorrows. Look on him as he stands alone, he is "of all men the most miserable;" view him as leaning on his beloved Lord, and there is not a being out of heaven so happy. "Sorrowful yet always rejoicing, having nothing and yet possessing all things," his whole life is a glorious paradox. May the living God give us that fellowship with him, which only can explain it!

We may draw yet one inference more;—*the true Christian must be a thankful man.* Be his life what it may, peaceful or troubled, it will be a life of praise.

We have seen that sin is the greatest affliction he knows. In his best moments, he deems it almost his only affliction. Now he finds in the Lord Jesus Christ a Saviour from this overwhelming evil; one who has purchased for him, who secures to him, nay, who has already in part given him, precisely that deliverance for which his soul longs. And what are his feelings as a conviction of this fact enters his mind? They are, they must be, feelings of gratitude and love; of gratitude proportioned, in some measure, to the magnitude of the evil he has escaped, and love as deep at least as the sense he has attained of his own vileness. If he does not pass through a cold world to heaven with a never failing song upon his lips, he does not always move along it in unbroken silence. "I thank God," he says, and says it often, and says it joyfully, "I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord. He has given me deliverance. Sin lives in me still, but he does not suffer it to reign. I was once its slave. It had tied and bound me in its filthy chains, and I could not break them. I did not wish to break them. It had perverted my affections, as well as enslaved my powers. I was a willing captive. But now,

blessed be God! though it torments me by day and vexes me by night; though it often embitters my existence, and makes my soul ache for my dying hour; though at times, for a moment, it leads me captive, and causes me to despise and loathe myself, filling me with unutterable emotions of self-aborrence and disgust; yet it has not dominion over me. Its power is broken. I feel it broken. I look upwards, and, in my Saviour's strength, I can and I do resist and overcome it. As for its condemning power, it cannot harm me. There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. His precious blood is more able to save, than the heaviest guilt to destroy. I know whom I have believed. Sin will still pollute, but he will not suffer it to ruin me. It may keep me wretched for a few short years, but I am safe for ever. At the grave my conflict will be ended. There my enemy must leave me. I shall wake up without a stain or a sorrow, in my Redeemer's glory and in Jehovah's likeness. O with what inconceivable joy shall I exclaim in that hour of wonder, I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

SERMON VIII.

THE FUTURE GLORY OF THE CHURCH.

EPHESIANS v. 25, 26, 27.

Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

THERE was a wonderful elevation in the mind of Saint Paul. Whatever occupied its thoughts, it seems to have been always pointing upwards, prepared to ascend in a moment to the highest and most heavenly things.

We have one of its rapid soarings in this text. The apostle is inculcating what we should call a plain, common-place duty, conjugal affection, the love which a husband ought to bear towards his wife. And how does he enforce it? By

arguments on a level with the duty itself? By considerations drawn from its reasonableness and utility? No. He ascends at once into a higher region. He thinks of the great Husband of the church, and without absolutely forgetting the point he is urging, he speaks of his love as though he had no other object in view than to display and adore it. Our souls are in a blessed state, brethren, when Christ thus dwells in the heart, when he is thus uppermost in the affections and thoughts, when every thing else is half lost sight of in the sweet remembrance of him. We could not have a surer proof of the reality of our love for him, nor a clearer token of having been marked out by him as his own.

The subject we have to consider is the future state of the church, viewed in connexion with the causes to which it is ascribed, and the great end for which so glorious a change in its condition is effected.

I. In describing *the future condition* of the church, the apostle has evidently in his mind two previous states of it; its original state when lying dead in trespasses and sins, and its subsequent earthly state, when separated from the mass of the ungodly and partially redeemed. It follows then that we have the people of Christ before us in three distinct points of view; first, as wholly

defiled, then as in some measure cleansed, and then as altogether pure. And this view of the passage will serve as a key to the right understanding of it; it will unlock its meaning.

It speaks first of "sanctifying and cleansing" the church;—there it intimates its complete defilement. It brings man before us in his natural condition, the condition in which Christ finds every one whom, in his saving mercy, he finds at all. This is an unsanctified, polluted condition. The stain of sin is on the soul, as well as the guilt of it. It is unfit for its Creator's use; it is not meet for his presence. It is worse than guilty, and helpless, and wretched; to a holy God it is an odious, loathsome thing.

This state is represented as altered, but at first not entirely so; for though sanctified and cleansed, we read of spots still left on the church. And thus comes out its present mixed, imperfect condition. It is not clearly what it once was. Spots pre-suppose a general purity and brightness of character; they are the partial disfigurements of an otherwise clean thing. A change therefore, and a great change, must have passed on the people referred to, before a word like this could be applied to any one of them. And as clearly their state is not what it is ultimately intended to be. There is something in it yet to be removed, and so much as is sufficient to mar its happiness and

tarnish its glory. It is a church rising up out of the polluting dust, coming up from the miry wilderness, emerging from the contamination it once loved; not holy yet, but beginning to discover the excellence and beauty of holiness; panting for it; hating, and loathing, and trying to throw off, "the garments spotted by the flesh," and longing to array itself in the white robes of heaven. It is echoing the language of Saint Paul, "O wretched man that I am!" It is asking with him, "Who shall deliver?"

And now at last we are come to its third and final state. The view which the apostle takes of this, may appear to some of us low and but little attractive. It may seem to be saying nothing, to say of heaven, the soul is without sin, without spot or blemish, there. But the man who has once felt the misery of a polluted nature, will think differently. He will feel as he reads this text, "Here is the blessing my heart aches for. This is the heaven in which I long to be—a holy world; a world where I can be tempted no more, and sin no more; where I can breathe an atmosphere that is not tainted, and breathe it without ever tainting it; where I may rest from the conflict that now wearies my inmost soul, cast away all watchfulness and fear, give the desires of my heart their widest and fondest range, and yet never wound my spirit nor offend my God."

How highly Saint Paul himself estimated this heavenly purity, we may infer from his dwelling so much on the idea of it in this place. He mentions it, and then he repeats the mention of it, and then, not satisfied, he repeats it again; heaping up words as though he found words too poor to describe it, too weak to come up even to his conceptions of its blessedness. The church is first "sanctified and cleansed;" then it is "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;" and at last it is "holy and without blemish."

All these expressions convey nearly the same meaning. "Spots" impair the moral beauty of the church;—they consequently shall be cleansed away. "Wrinkles" are signs of decay, and feebleness, and suffering;—not one of them shall be left. The soul shall wake up in immortal youth; vigorous as well as pure; with every power in full activity, able to execute the commands of Jehovah, to enter into his joy, to stand before his throne, and to serve him in his temple. "Blemishes" are defects. In our present state, we are wanting in every thing. In heaven, every defect shall be supplied; nothing shall be missing in us, which can bring glory to our Redeemer or happiness to ourselves. Taken together, the words convey this idea, that the church, in its future state, shall be free from sin and from all the consequences of sin. No remnant, or effect, or stain, or trace, of the

accursed thing shall be left on it. It shall be as pure as though sin had never come near it; still indeed bearing the marks of the process it has undergone, still testifying to a wondering universe of saving mercy and renewing grace, but shewing forth these operations of its God, not by the incompleteness of his work, but by the elevation to which he has raised it, the depth of its humility, and the fervour of its songs.

But there are different standards of purity, and some of us may be ready to ask, "According to what standard is the future holiness of the redeemed to be measured? In whose estimation will it be complete?" O the riches of Jehovah's goodness, and O the power of Jehovah's Spirit! It will be complete in his estimation, in whose sight his own "heavens are not clean," and who "charges his very angels with folly." To be sinless in our own estimation would be nothing; thousands of the ungodly have attained to this even on this wicked earth: to be deemed pure by our fellow-sinners would still be nothing: to stand spotless in the sight of angels might satisfy an angel's mind; but the purity of the ransomed spirit will soar high above all this. It will be faultless in his presence, who sees things as they are; "to whom all hearts are open and from whom no secrets are hid;" and faultless not when viewed by him at a distance, but brought into his

immediate presence, placed as it were in comparison with him, in the full blaze of his glory. Is this language too strong? The Holy Spirit has employed language like it. "Now unto him," says Saint Jude, "that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless"—where? "before the presence of his glory; to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever."

II. And how will this amazing change in the soul be effected? The apostle tells us. He points out, secondly, *the causes to which it is to be ascribed*. Of these he mentions four.

1. The first is *the love of Christ*. "He loved the church."

And something of this nature seems to have been necessary for the accomplishing of so great a work. Mercy, kindness, compassion, might all have been inadequate to the end. They might have broken down, been exhausted and worn out, long before it was accomplished, had not some stronger principle been at the root of them, and kept them all in exercise. "By grace are ye saved," says Saint Paul, but it is a grace which had its origin in love, and still finds in love its spring, its life and freshness. It is accompanied, and sustained, and strengthened, by love. It is in fact love itself under another name; love putting on

the form of grace, that it may pour blessings on the guilty in the only way in which it can bless them, with the freeness and authority that become the Monarch of the skies.

And is not this an almost overwhelming thought? I can easily conceive of myself as an object of compassion in heaven; an immortal being in a condition so deplorable as mine, might well excite that feeling even in a merciless hell; but to be an object of love to my holy Saviour in my present state of vileness, nay, to have been that in my original pollution, before once his Spirit touched me, with every imagination of my heart only evil, and every feeling of my soul towards my God a feeling of rebellion—I strive in vain to comprehend such love. And so, brethren, did Paul. With his lofty mind, he could not grasp it; he was constrained to say, “It passeth knowledge.”

2. But look at it in its effects. And the first glance we give it in this view discovers to us another step towards our final purity—the *sacrifice of Christ*.

Earthly love will seldom bear examination. It is either weak, willing to do little or nothing for its object, or it is a blind, reckless, absorbing passion; laying reason prostrate, confounding right and wrong, and trampling alike on every human and sacred obligation. But was the love of Christ

weak? It did all that love ever could do; "he gave himself for us." Was it destructive of his moral excellence, or heedless of Jehovah's law? The same answer may be returned again, for it meets the question; "he gave himself for us." He might have gratified his love for us at once; a word from his lips would have placed us before him pure and happy, without involving on his part any earthly degradation, or pain, or sacrifice; but the honour of his character as the world's great Governor, the welfare of the creatures over whom he ruled, both said, "No. Sin must be expiated. Before the sinner can be blessed, offended justice must be appeased; a broken law must be magnified." And the result was, love and righteousness, mercy and justice, triumphed together. He put himself in the sinner's stead, came forth in our form the Representative of his guilty church, took all its transgressions on his head; and then stooping down to the obligations and enduring the penalties of his own law, he did what none other ever could have done, he opened a way by which, without impairing his authority, grace could come down from heaven on man, and man go up to heaven redeemed and purified, as welcome and happy as the happiest dweller there. Not that his cross of itself sanctifies. This work is ascribed to it, because it supplies the strongest motives to sanctification, and because, in con-

junction with his obedience, it purchased for sinners that heavenly grace which makes these motives effectual.

3. Hence the apostle goes on to bring before us *the Holy Spirit* as a third source to which the church must ascribe its future holiness. He does not indeed expressly mention him, but when he speaks of our being cleansed by "the washing of water," he evidently has him in his mind. If we say that he means baptism, we say the same thing in other words; for what is baptism? If any thing more than a mere ceremony, if it has in it any meaning at all, it is an outward, visible sign of an inward and spiritual operation. And what is this operation? It is the purifying of the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost. It is the carrying into effect of Christ's purposes of love towards us by Christ's own Spirit. It is the sanctifying of man, setting him apart for God, and making him meet for his enjoyment and service. Let the apostle explain himself. There is a wonderful as well as beautiful harmony in his writings, and that not merely in the truths he inculcates, but in his arrangement and exposition of those truths. "After that," he says in his epistle to Titus, "the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared; not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the

washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

4. And how does the Holy Spirit carry on this cleansing process? The text shews us, and its answer to the question reminds us of the fourth means of our sanctification—*the word of God*. "The washing of water" is "by the word."

This is the uniform testimony of scripture concerning itself. "Ye are clean," says Christ to his disciples, "through the word which I have spoken unto you." "Sanctify them through thy truth," he says again to his Father; "thy word is truth."

We do not say that the word is the only instrument employed by the Spirit. He employs many—mercies, and comforts, and disappointments, and conflicts, and a whole train of bitter sorrows. All that happens to us, and all that surrounds us, he can bring to bear on our souls, and turn into a furnace to refine us. But when he uses these, it is to explain, and confirm, and enforce, the declarations of his lips; to recall them to our treacherous memories; to make us feel their power. Providence, in his hands, becomes a practical commentary on his word.

What then is the Bible, brethren? and what are the sermons we hear from sabbath to sabbath? They are mentioned here in connection with the love of Christ, the sacrifice of Christ, the Spirit of Christ. The purification, and consequently the

salvation, of our immortal souls, is as much ascribed to them as to any of these lofty things. And yet how completely powerless do we often find them! There are times when they can no more raise an emotion in our earth-bound souls than in the stones we tread on. All their efficacy comes from the Holy Ghost. Without him, the Bible is a book, and nothing more than a book; an object, as it may happen, of our curiosity or of our contempt, our admiration or our scorn. In either case, it does not work; it is equally a dead letter. But put that feeble book into the Spirit's hand, and what is it become? None but those who have experienced its power, can tell. It is the sword of the Spirit; it is the rod of Jehovah's strength; it is the instrument by which the soul is mastered and subdued; emptied of its ignorance, and self-sufficiency, and iniquity, and wretchedness; and filled with the humility, the holiness, the blessedness, of heaven. I cannot then be a holy man, and remain ignorant of the power of God's word. It must have reached my heart, and I must have discovered its value and excellence. I must hold it in the very highest estimation. I must read it too with a relish and delight. If it is leading me to heaven, its testimonies are my counsellors, and its "statutes my songs in the house of my pilgrimage."

We have now a complete view of the causes

which are working out that glorious change we are considering. If we enquire for its source, we find it in the love of Christ; in other words, in the desire of effecting this change existing in the divine mind, and owing its existence there to the benevolence of that mind. The next step shews us this love in exercise; removing out of its way the obstacles which interposed between it and the sinner;—here comes in the Redeemer's sacrifice. And now we behold it in contact with the sinner;—the Holy Spirit reaching and purifying him by his grace, like the washing of water. And the instrument he employs in this process, is the word of God, a right understanding of its testimony and a heart-felt belief in its truth.

III. We have to go on now to our last point—*the great end for which all these means of holiness are brought into operation.*

It is, we are told, to “sanctify and cleanse” the church. But why is the church to be thus sanctified? What is the ultimate object aimed at in this cleansing? All terminates in this one blessed end, that Christ, in the great day of his triumph, may “present the church unto himself a glorious church.”

However far the apostle may seem to have been led away, in this passage, from the subject he introduces it to illustrate, there is no doubt but that

he still keeps that subject in mind. These expressions have a remote allusion to it. They refer to the custom which prevails in eastern countries, of presenting an espoused virgin to her betrothed husband at the celebration of the marriage ceremony. The church is often referred to as the bride of the Redeemer. In this character Saint Paul speaks of "espousing her to one husband," and "presenting her as a chaste virgin to Christ." But here there is a peculiarity in the language he uses. The office of presenting the bride belongs properly to her parents or friends; but save the Lord Jesus Christ, what parent or friend has the lost church? Like the object of mercy spoken of by Ezekiel and evidently intended to be an emblem of her, she is cast out friendless and forlorn, without an eye to pity or a hand to help her. In this state of destitution, the Bridegroom looks round for no father for her, no friend. He presents her to himself. He takes her in all her abject misery, as the beloved of his soul, and he loves her and delights in her the more, because no hand save his own has rescued her, because she owes all her greatness and all her happiness to him alone.

At the time of her presentation to Christ, we are further told that she shall be "a glorious church;" and we feel at once that in a situation like hers, she must be glorious. Her high desti-

nation, we say, constitutes her glory. She goes into heaven the bride of the enthroned Saviour; she is taken into the very closest alliance with the most exalted Being in the universe; she sits down with him on his throne. No elevation equals hers. So marvellous is the honour put on her, that the Holy Spirit calls them happy who are allowed even to witness it. "Blessed," says he, "are they who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb." He employs the noblest objects in nature to shadow her forth. He clothes her with the sun; the moon is put under her feet; and on her head is a crown of stars. She is "a wonder in heaven."

But what is all this? It strains our imaginations to form a single idea of its grandeur, but, in Saint Paul's estimation, there is something yet higher. He does not place the chief glory of the church in the lofty eminence she has climbed; he does not see it in the radiance which covers her; no, he traces it still in her purity. She is "a glorious church," and this, even on the summit of her greatness, constitutes her glory—she has "no spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;" she is "holy and without blemish."

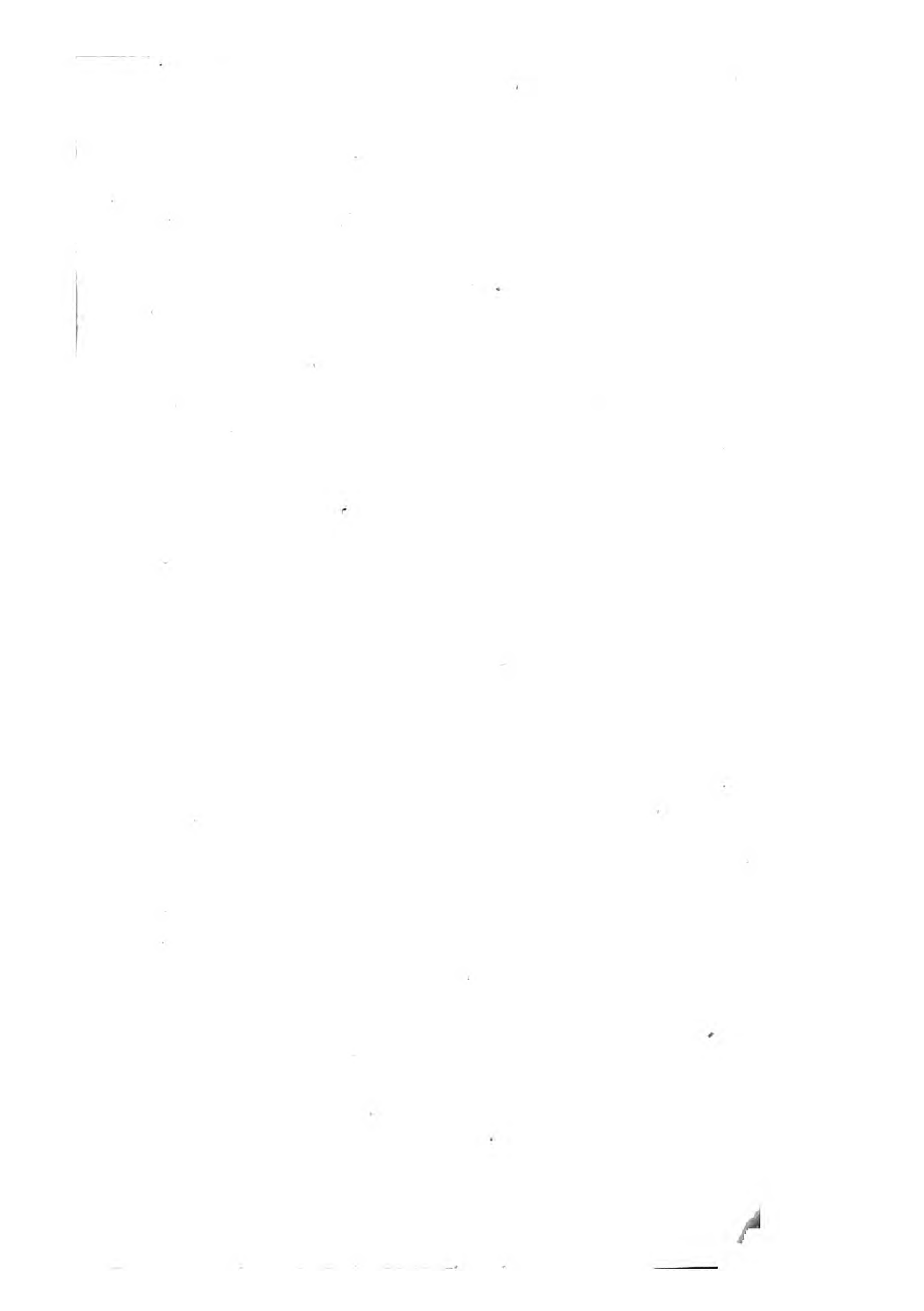
Nothing dishonours, brethren, but sin; nothing but sin is really shameful. Now take sin from the soul, and you have removed out of its way every thing that can degrade it. And then array

it in the exalted purity we have been contemplating, you have put on it the very highest honour a creature of God can receive. No matter who or what that creature is, holiness is its perfection, the highest pinnacle of excellence to which it can either attain or aspire. Nay, we may go farther. The chief glory of God is the holiness of God. His purity is his brightest attribute. His power and immensity strike us more, for our minds are debased, we have lost the perception of that which is most elevated in its character, moral greatness ; but go up into heaven, or rather read the language of heaven as we find it in the Bible—power and majesty are both extolled in it, but this is the one great subject of adoration in heaven, in the very world where all the divine greatness is most fully manifested, the purity of Jehovah ; and this the song which, next to the song of salvation, rings most constantly in its splendid courts, “ Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts.”

No wonder then that the church will be “ a glorious church ;” the likeness of God will be put on her, the image of God will shine in her ; that attribute of Divinity, which is the perfection of Divinity, will be her crown. “ The King’s daughter shall be all glorious,” because she is “ glorious within.” She has left all her impurity in the world she has forsaken, and has waked up in her

Redeemer's likeness, "holy and without blemish." She is in heaven, not with an angel's holiness, but with the holiness of her Lord; a holiness that causes the infinite Jehovah, as he looks on her "faultless" before him, to look on her with complacency, and admiration, and delight; with a feeling which, in the plenitude of his inconceivable happiness, he himself calls "exceeding joy."

We have now gone through our subject. The one great truth we are to learn from it is *the real value of holiness*. The estimation in which men in general hold it, is seen at a glance. We cannot say that they undervalue it, for they set no value on it at all; they treat it with contempt. And worse than this—some of them deem it an evil, rather than a good. The law that enjoins it, were they to speak out, they would call a law of harshness and severity. It is a system of restraints, a galling yoke, an intolerable burden. This is man's judgment; now see God's judgment. He forms the determination to place in heaven a people who shall be more glorious than any besides, a people who shall appear there in a relation to him so close, that he represents it by bringing before our minds the image of a chosen and beloved bride. This people he determines to take from our fallen earth. Now what course does he



adopt to carry his design into effect? How does he lift up fallen man to this height of honour? He "sanctifies and cleanses" him; he makes him holy. He adopts this course to make him glorious—he makes him pure.

God had also another object in view in his mysterious dealings with man. He determined to display the love of his own infinite mind in the very highest way in which it could be displayed; to go to the uttermost in the manifestation of it, not only in the mode of its exhibition, but in the end accomplished by it. This end is our purification. He strips us of the sin that degrades us, and gives us in exchange for it his own holiness; and then the angels that surround him are constrained to say, "Behold, how he has loved them!"

And once more observe how dearly he purchases for us this purity. It is not, like the sun and the stars, the effect of a creating word. He spake, and they shone forth, in a moment, in all their magnificence. But when the church is to be cleansed, all the energies of Jehovah are called into exercise. We dare not say that there was effort in heaven, but there was in this thing a display of power, and wisdom, and grace, which heaven had never before witnessed. God gave himself for us. He stoops down to a sinner's form, dwells in a sinner's world, and lies down in

a sinner's grave. And then the eternal Spirit puts forth his omnipotence. He establishes ordinances; he sends forth prophets and ministers; with his own everlasting pen, he writes his word; he sets up an apparatus of mercy on the earth, and preserves it there age after age, and all to produce this one effect, to put on a company of redeemed sinners the likeness of their God.

Is sin then a blessing, brethren? Can indulgence in sin make one of you happy? O what a libel on the gospel is such an idea! What an aspersion cast on the judgment and ways of an all-wise God! Sin may be sweet to a polluted mind; pleasure may be wrung out of iniquity; we may love "the unclean thing" better than we love heaven, or peace of conscience, or even life itself; but our love for it alters not its nature. In exact proportion as holiness is a blessing, sin is a curse; there is as much misery in the one, as there is blessedness in the other; and in the end we shall know this, and own it. Our judgments, the judgment of every creature that lives, shall correspond with the judgment of God. Even in the hell in which sin was born, it shall be acknowledged to be the heaviest, the only evil. In heaven, where all happiness abounds, holiness shall be felt to be the highest good. They who rejoice in it, shall deem it the perfection of their excellence, the consummation of their bliss.

I see then what I ought most fervently to desire, and most earnestly to seek. It is not a mere change of situations or of worlds, but a more complete change of heart. It is not simply the kingdom or presence of my Lord, but his likeness, his holiness. Higher than this I cannot look ; lower than this, by God's help, I will not. I will deem every thing an evil that obstructs my pursuit of this ; I will consider every thing a good that brings me nearer to this, or quickens my longings for it. The thought of it shall teach me to prize my Bible, as though it were my chief earthly treasure ; it shall cause me to welcome sabbaths and ordinances with emotions of joy. The hope of it, if it does not take from afflictions all their bitterness, shall make me willing to receive them, and turn at least some of my tears into tears of thankfulness. It shall endear the blessed Jesus to my heart as my Purifier, as well as my Saviour. No longer will I seek holiness in my own proud resolutions and efforts. I will seek it where I have sought and still seek my pardon. I will look for it to the love, and the cross, and the Spirit, and the word, of Christ. And I know that I shall not look in vain. As surely as he wore my form, I shall wear his. I shall be like him when I see him as he is.

SERMON IX.

THE HISTORY OF JONAH'S GOURD.

JONAH iv. 6, 7.

The Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

WE have little more here than the history of a single plant—its springing up, the effect produced by it on a prophet's mind, and then its withering away;—a subject, it may be thought, scarcely worthy of our attention; but the great God, brethren, has deemed it worthy of his everlasting pen, and there is not one praying heart that may not get from it instruction and comfort; more, it

may be, that any of us expect, more certainly than the best of us deserve.

I. Notice, first, *the springing up of this gourd*, its birth. And this took place under very remarkable and really affecting circumstances. Jonah had preached at Nineveh; he had come to it with a message from God denouncing its speedy ruin. He cried in its streets and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." The people profited by this warning; they humbled themselves greatly before the Lord; and the consequence was, the Lord "repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not." And now where is Jonah? Rejoicing in the success of his ministry? going through the streets of the rescued city, and exhorting its inhabitants to thankfulness and praise? No; we are told in the first verse of this chapter, that the sparing of Nineveh "displeased him exceedingly." He thought that it would affect his reputation as a prophet, cause his threatenings in future to be disregarded and himself contemned; and this was more than he could bear. Mortified and angry, he wishes and even prays that he may die; and then leaving the town, seats himself in a booth or tent on the outside of it, still hoping perhaps that in some way or other God would visit it with his judgments, and that he might have the gratifica-

tion of witnessing them. And this was the man for whom the Lord prepared a gourd, and this the moment when he prepared it.

1. Learn here then that *a gracious God sometimes visits us with mercies when we have reason to expect judgments*; I mean, special mercies when we merit special judgments, and even put ourselves in the way of them.

Rage drives Jonah out of Nineveh into the scorching heat of an eastern sun, and there, while he was quarrelling with God and asking for death, springs up suddenly a towering, wide-spreading plant to shelter and comfort him. Another prophet too, Elijah, is similarly dealt with. He also flies from the abodes of men; he goes into a desolate wilderness; and in that wilderness, out of the path of duty, comfort from heaven comes to him. God first feeds him by an angel, and then keeps him alive for forty days without any food at all. In seasons like these, the dark seasons of the spiritual life, faith is weak, and a compassionate God stoops to its weakness. He gives the soul sensible indications of his love, recalls it to its duty and its happiness by mercies which it can feel and understand.

“But is not this,” you may ask, “an encouragement to sin?” No, brethren; not to sin, but to prayer; an encouragement in every situation to cast ourselves on God and hope in his good-

ness. It forbids us to say in trying circumstances, "I have brought this evil on myself, and I must bear it." Out of the lowest depths of trouble and even guilt, it tells us to cry unto the Lord with David, "O bring thou me out of my distresses. Look upon mine affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins."

2. And learn further that *in the meanest of God's servants, there is no want too small for God to notice, no suffering too slight for him to relieve.* Jonah's worthless head is as much an object of his concern, as Jonah's guilty soul. He provides a Saviour for the one, but that does not content him—he raises up a miraculous gourd for the comfort of the other.

In no point, brethren, do we mistake more than in this. "This matter," we say, "is too contemptible to take to God." It grieves us, and burdens and perplexes us; but then it is a little thing, and the great God who rolls along the stars in their courses, cannot, we think, stoop down to it; it is beneath his regard. But O the narrowness of our thoughts of God! Is he not an infinite God? and are not his condescension and love boundless? as boundless as the power that fixed the sun in the heavens, and then created the worm on the ground? We limit him, we dishonour him, when we say, "This is too small for him," as much as when we say, "That is too

great." Then are our views of him right, then is our faith strong, when we see him every where; and go to him in every thing; when we expect him to be as mindful of the hairs of our head, as of the brightest orb in the skies. Hear his own account of the matter. The covenant he has made with his chosen, is "ordered," he tells us, "in all things." The care he invites us to roll on him, is "all our care;" the need he promises to supply, "all our need." And as for comfort, he bids us look on a mother pressing her infant to her heart, anxious to discover every want, and, in her solicitude, almost labouring to remove imaginary griefs; and then he says to us, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." Is a plant springing out of the ground to shade our head, wonderful? He is willing to send down his Holy Spirit from the everlasting heavens to drive one painful thought out of the very vilest heart.

3. And in all this he magnifies himself; for mark yet another truth implied here—*The Lord often reveals his greatness by the mode in which he imparts comfort and manifests his compassion.*

I allude not to that sudden and strange consolation which he sometimes communicates to the burdened soul in prayer, which comes we hardly know whence nor how, and takes away, almost before we are aware, the anguish which we once

thought nothing could remove. I speak of those dispensations of providence, those unexpected deliverances, and blessings, and comforts, which every servant of God occasionally experiences; things occurring in a moment to help and gladden him, which all his contrivance and labour could not bring about; and occurring so, that he must be blind not to see in them the hand, and the love, and the power, of God.

Jonah goes to work under the wall of Nineveh; he makes him a booth, and sits under its shadow; but the sun still flames above him and strikes down on him: his labour is vain. That was Jonah's work; now comes God and works. In an hour, perhaps in an instant, a plant strikes its root downwards, and sends its branches upwards, and Jonah is sitting at his ease in its cool and refreshing shade. And this without any labour, without a movement, on his part. As we are told in the tenth verse, he neither "laboured for it, nor made it to grow." The Lord, it is said in the text, "made it to come up over him." It covered him as he sat.

We have not to run after goodness and mercy, brethren. If we are the friends of Christ, they will follow, run after us. Our compassionate Father will not only do for us what we need, but do it with speed; as the psalmist expresses it, he will do it "right early;" he will set wheels, as it

were, to his power and goodness. He will bend events to his purpose; nay, if need be, he will change the very course of nature to comfort his afflicted saints. "I will deliver thee," he says, "and thou shalt glorify me." "I will so deliver thee, that thou shalt see my glory in thy deliverance, and magnify my name."

II. But we must pass on to a less pleasing part of our subject—*the effect produced on the prophet's mind by this affecting interposition of God in his behalf.*

And now comes out human nature. How unlike the nature of God! We are told that "Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd;" or, as it is rendered in the margin, "he rejoiced in it with great joy."

1. Well may we wonder at the folly of that heart which could take so much pleasure in so mean a thing, but there is greater reason still to wonder at *its amazing selfishness.*

This history is like a libel on human nature. There sits a man, and a man of God too, looking down on a city containing a million of souls, and actually expecting the judgments of heaven every moment to blast it; and yet in this situation, with every proud and angry feeling working in his mind, studying his own comfort as though he had nothing else to think of, and rejoicing in a little

ease for his worthless body, as though he had acquired some heavenly and everlasting good. "So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd; he rejoiced with great joy." What could he have done more, if the heavens had been rent, and descending angels had told him of a Saviour's advent? A thing like this seems incredible; but look into the world, look into your own hearts, and you believe it in a moment. What at times has been a perishing world, a suffering neighbour, nay, a dying friend, to us? Nothing. Our own cares and concerns have absorbed us; our every feeling and every thought has been swallowed up in self. And when has this occurred? When we have forgotten God; when we have wandered from the Lord; when our love to a bleeding Saviour has grown cold, and our view of him distant, and our communion with him slight. There is no keeping the heart generous and warm, but near the cross. Feeling there may be elsewhere, and sometimes lively and deep feeling, but it will generally be fluctuating and always selfish; it can never be trusted. Nothing beats down the vile love of self, but the love of Christ. That, and that only, can give birth to a pure, and disinterested, and abiding affection; a love that can lay passion, and vanity, and pride, and jealousy, and every other bad feeling of man's bad heart, prostrate beneath its power, and find its

delight and its reward in the welfare of its object.

2. But there is something more to be noticed in this strange joy. We see depicted in it *the ingratitude of the human heart*.

Suppose yourselves, brethren, in this prophet's situation; sitting, faint and gasping, on the parched ground under a burning sun, not a tree or a covert near, all desolation without and suffering within. On a sudden branches bend over your head, wide-spreading leaves throw their shade and probably their fragrance around you; you are embowered by a miracle. What would be your first feeling? Wonder perhaps, astonishment. But what your second? You would spring from the earth, or rather you would lie down on it, and pour out the feelings of thankfulness in tears and praise. Such, it may be, has been your conduct under some of your mercies, and blessed then have those mercies proved to you; but if your hearts are like other hearts, like Jonah's heart, it has not been always thus. You have sometimes forgotten God in the comforts he has given you; and those very comforts have been the causes of your forgetting him. Instead of being as stars to lead you to Christ, they have separated between Christ and your soul; they have taken his place within you, and absorbed in themselves the love, and delight, and thoughts, which are his due, and which but

for them he might have possessed. You have prized the gift, and in the gift and because of it, you have lost sight of the bountiful Giver. There is nothing wrong in receiving a mercy with joy; the sin and the shame lie in an effort to take up our rest in it, in saying or feeling, "I have now the desire of my heart, and am satisfied. I have much goods laid up. Soul, take thine ease." And this is the way in which we lose our comforts.

III. Look, thirdly, at *the withering of this over-valued gourd*. "God," says the history, "prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered."

1. Here we are reminded, first, that *all earthly comforts are short-lived; they are frail and perishing*. They are all gourds, withering gourds. They often die while we are rejoicing in them.

Every one says this, and every one appears to believe it; but it is marvellous how little hold this truth has on the judgment of any one of us, and how much less still it affects our prospects, our purposes, or our conduct. Men talk every hour as though it were a jest. "This sickly child may die," says one, "but that strong youth will live to be the prop and comfort of my age." "My parent I must soon lay in the grave," says another, "but my husband, my brother, my friend,

will still be by my side, and prove my solace and stay." "My property is wasting," says a third, "but my health is sound. I can labour for more." "Men are changeable and treacherous, I know," says yet another, "but I have tried that friend, and he never will fail me." Such is the language of an inconsiderate world; but what is the language of truth and fact? They take us to the booth of Jonah; they shew us his withered gourd; and as they point to it, they say, "It came up in a night, and it perished in a night. Thy gourds also are frail. They may grow in luxuriance and be green in beauty, may afford exceeding pleasure to you while they last; but as to their continuance, think not of it. Hast thou them to-day? Be thankful and sober-minded in the use of them; but boast not thyself of to-morrow: thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

2. And connect with this truth another—*The comfort that most delights us, is generally the first to perish*; the mercies we lose the soonest, are those we love the best.

This, brethren, is not the mere language of sentiment or poetry; it is the testimony of fact. Jonah's experience proves its truth, and so does our own. When have we ever put the creature in God's place, given it that room in our soul which he ought to occupy, but God has either removed it, or embittered it, or put an end to it?

Many of our blessings have we lost by loving them too well. We have slain them by setting too great a value on them, and taking our rest in them. There is not a single earthly good that will bear man's hand, when man firmly grasps it. His touch withers and destroys every thing. And O what a mercy for man that it is so! It is in this way that a forgotten God recalls our wandering affections to himself. He lays waste the enthroned creature, that he may once again enthrone himself. He breaks the cistern, not that we may be left parched and fainting in the wilderness of life, but go and satisfy our thirsting souls once again from the everlasting spring. He crushes the reed, but he substitutes for it a rock. He puts far away from us "lover and friend," with all the unutterable sweetness of their affection and the tenderness of their love, but what does he substitute? Himself; the intense, unfathomable love of his own infinite mind, the presence of Christ, and communion with heaven.

3. But there is something worthy of notice in the time when this gourd withered. It was, you observe, "when the morning rose," a little before the sun appeared. All through the night, when its protection was but little wanted, it flourished; but now, just at the time when it is most needed, it dies. And what does this shew? It shews that *our comforts are often taken from us, when they*

appear to be the most needed. Our prop gives way when we are the weakest. Our friends die, our health sinks, our property goes, just at the very period when we seem as though we could not do without them. We build a house, we get into it, and, though it stands on the sand, it does well enough for a time, for there is nothing to try either it or us; but the storm gathers, "the vehement east wind" comes; and where is our refuge now? Prostrate, and we are half buried in its ruins. O the pains that God takes to empty us of earthly confidence! not only smiting the comforts we most prize, but smiting them in that very hour which is most likely to shew us their vanity, and in that very manner also!

4. For observe, lastly, that *our comforts often perish from unforeseen and very inconsiderable causes.* A trifle destroys them.

The instrument that God used wherewith to afflict Jonah, was a contemptible one. He might have sent a hurricane to uproot his gourd, a wild beast out of the forest to devour it, or lightning from heaven to blast it; but he prepares a worm, and but one worm, to execute the work, and the work is done, done effectually, done suddenly, as if with violence; "it smote the gourd that it withered." The stoutest arm and the keenest axe could not have done more.

Just as God honours himself in blessing by

choosing those instruments which appear to the eye of sense altogether inadequate for his purpose, so he often honours himself in afflicting. He strips us bare we know not how; robs us of our dearest mercies by means that we should never have suspected of being able to touch a hair of our heads.

Out of heaven, happiness is never safe. The fruit of a tree ruined it in paradise, and minute indeed are the trifles that often ruin it now. Whose mind has not a word or a look fevered? Who has not had his rest broken, his soul thrown into a tumult, by causes which he would be unwilling for even a child to know; things that he despises himself for heeding, but the tormenting influence of which he cannot withstand? Would you see man in his weakness, brethren? Look at the contemptible trifles that amuse, and delight, and almost content him: look at much of his gladness—it comes from a gourd. And then look at the trifles that vex and disturb him; that destroy his comforts;—a worm can smite them, a breath can end them; yea he himself, as well as all on earth that grieves and gladdens him, is “crushed before the moth.” Jonah “exceeding glad of his gourd” was a weaker man than Jonah struggling in the waves. His feebleness comes out, not in the hurricane and storm, but beneath an insect’s blow, the smiting of a worm.

Such is the history of this miraculous plant ;— it sprang up, it gave delight, it set to work the baseness of the human heart, and then it withered. And is not this the history of every comfort the earth brings forth ? Has it not been the history of almost all your own ? You need not be told again why it is so ; why the same God that prepares the gourd, prepares also the worm : why he takes away the comforts that he gives. There is not a man of God among you, who is not ready to say, “ He does it all in love ; in compassion for my ignorant, earthly soul ; to make me feel in how empty a world I am living, what a base heart I am carrying about in it, what an abundant cause I have to lie down in the dust in self-abasement and shame. He does it to allure me to himself ; to shew me his goodness, and power, and all-sufficiency ; to make me see the fulness that is in him, that I may desire it, and draw out of it, and live on it, and rejoice in it. He would make me long for heaven, and till I arrive in heaven, he would reconcile me to his ways. I often quarrel with his dispensations ; they thwart my will, or they disappoint my expectations, or they wound my pride. He sends me trouble, and in my trouble I am taught his righteousness, love, and truth. “ Thou hast had pity on the gourd,” he said to Jonah, “ for the which thou hast not laboured neither madest it

grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night; and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle." In his providence, he often says the same to me. As I contemplate the ruin he has spread around me, or muse over the fond objects of my idolatry he has hidden from my sight, O how my soul has sometimes felt ashamed of its baseness and wondered at its folly! And then my afflicting God has discovered to me his glory. I see and adore his wisdom. My suspicions of his goodness are changed into confidence and praise."

This history, in fact, speaks to us all. It bids us care less about a passing world. It tells us plainly that we are liable to be deprived of every thing under which we take shelter or delight; and it calls on us to seek after that refuge and comfort, of which no creature either small or great can rob us. And is there such a refuge, such comfort, for harassed, miserable man? Yes, brethren; for every one who is weary of a deceitful earth and a still more deceitful heart. It is in Christ Jesus; in a manifested, incarnate God; in his cross, and righteousness, and Spirit; in union and intercourse with him. And it is no where else. A crucified Jesus is the one only remedy for all human ills, the one only source of all solid

happiness. And a lasting, unchangeable source ;
“ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” No
worm withers this tree of life ; no storms shake,
no time decays, no enemy harms it. It stands
fair and glorious in a desolate world, “ a refuge
from the storm, a shadow from the heat.” On its
head is glory ; around it, fragrance ; in its leaves,
healing ; underneath it is rest and safety, glad-
ness and everlasting songs.

SERMON X.

THE RISEN JESUS QUESTIONING PETER'S LOVE.

ST. JOHN xxi. 17.

He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? and he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.

THE compassionate Jesus never grieved unnecessarily a single heart. When therefore we find him thus paining anew the stricken Peter, we may be sure that he had some object in view of more than ordinary importance; at all events, too important to be sacrificed either to his disciple's feelings or his own. That object perhaps is easily discovered. It appears to have been the vindication of his own holiness.

Peter had sinned against him; he had basely and publicly disowned him. Christ had pardoned his offence; nay, he had made an open exhibition of the pardon he had given him; he had treated him immediately after his resurrection with peculiar favour, and might have almost been thought to love him more for the injury he had done him. No sooner therefore are Peter's wounds a little healed, than his risen Lord must let him see, must let the other disciples and must let us see, that he never loses his holiness in his tenderness; that in the lowest depths of his compassion, in the most soaring heights of his love, he hates sin; hates it as much when he speaks peace to a contrite heart, as when he strikes down the thousands of murmuring Israel in the desert, or deluges a world. He accordingly reproves Peter. But mark how gently he reproves him. Nothing is said of his offence; no mention is made of his cowardice, or oaths, or curses: all he has to bear is this simple question, "Lovest thou me?" True, the reproof was a little strengthened by the manner in which he was addressed. His Master calls him not Peter, the name he himself had given him. He was unworthy of such a title. A feather tossed by the wind was a better emblem of the man, than the rock which withstands the storm. Hence his fisherman's name is revived; he is called once more, "Simon, son of Jonas."

But yet again, in thus sending him back to the days of his ignorance, Christ does not disown him. He exalts even while he reproves him, giving him a public opportunity of making a repeated declaration of his faith and love, and re-investing him with his apostolic commission. Thrice Peter had virtually renounced it; thrice his Lord returns it into his hands.

Brethren, what a Master is ours! He is "righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works," and yet he spares us when we deserve chastisement, and even "in his wrath he remembers mercy." He often pardons our sins before he reproves them; and then he makes that very reproof, when it comes, a fresh manifestation of his love; putting honour on us with one hand, while he gently scourges us with the other.

In proceeding to examine more closely his question to Peter and afterwards Peter's reply to it, I hardly need say that a question thrice repeated by the Son of God, and as often answered by a beloved apostle, is deserving of your attention. No question that you can be asked, is more deserving of it. May the Spirit of God carry it home to your hearts.

I. 1. We gather from *our Lord's enquiry*, first, that *he takes pleasure in the love of his people*

towards him, and in their avowal of it. And herein he discovers his human nature.

We are all conscious that whenever there is any real affection in our minds towards any object, we desire to see the same affection in that object towards ourselves, and are gratified by any sincere and well-timed manifestation of it. Jonathan shared in this feeling. We read that when he had made a covenant of friendship with David, he was not content with David's pledging himself once to a faithful adherence to it; he "caused him to swear again." And why? Because he distrusted his friend? Because he wished to throw more cords around him? "No," says the sacred historian, "because he loved him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul."

Now our Lord's heart is, in all sinless things, like our hearts. He loved Peter, loved him with the tenderest and the most intense affection. He found gratification therefore, not only in Peter's love towards him, but in those reiterated assurances of it, which this trial of him drew forth. He makes no enquiry, observe, into his faith or hope, he asks him not one question as to the reality or depth of his contrition; all he says is, "Lovest thou me?"

And pass not over this, brethren, as a matter of mere sentiment. It is a fact, and a heart-cheering fact, that he who died for my sins, sets

a high value on my love ; a love that many a fellow-worm would not take at my hands, that scarcely one on the earth deems worth his keeping or acceptance. Poor as it is, and poor as it ever must be, my Saviour delights in it, and so delights in it, that his happiness, even on his heavenly throne, would be marred were he to lose it. "He taketh pleasure," he tells me, "in them that fear him," in them that merely stand in awe of his greatness and majesty ; how much more then in those who love him ! who love him in that character which forms his brightest glory, his character of a Saviour ! love him as a pardoned sinner loves him, with a love which, mean as it may be, is yet such as no angel ever knew ; such as heaven itself never witnessed, till it glowed there in a sinner's heart, and burst forth there in praise from a sinner's lips.

2. We may infer again that *Christ has now a special claim on our love.*

Previously to his final sufferings and death, he does not appear to have ever questioned any of his disciples as to the state of their affections towards himself. Tender as was his heart, his main concern seems to have been that they might be obedient to his Father, and at peace among themselves. But when for their sakes he had gone to Golgotha and Calvary, when he had bled in the garden, and expired on the cross, and laid himself

down in the grave, he felt and acted like one who had now earned a claim on a sinner's affection, and such a claim as even a sinner's heart, in all its death-like coldness, could not resist. He comes out of the tomb, he shews the weeping Peter his hands and his side, and then he says to him, and he says the same to every one of us who have heard of his agony and cross, "Lovest thou me?"

We have been told however that all this is degrading; that such a love for Christ, as is grounded on any thing he has done or suffered for us, is base; that the only affection he will accept, is that which takes its rise from admiration of his excellencies, the attractions of his human nature and the glories of his divine. But what will not men say when they have a theory to uphold, or a conceit to adorn? The wisest of them can argue readily against his own experience, and dispute against the plainest facts. What can these reasoners know of their own hearts? We feel at once that they know nothing of ours. They are more fit to talk to adoring seraphs than to men like ourselves. True, the blessed Jesus is "altogether lovely," "fairer than the children of men" or the angels of God. But what then? All the blaze of glory with which our imaginations can surround him; all the moral beauty in which a mind the most soaring and refined, can invest him; the power that awes, and

the greatness that overwhelms; the patience that never wearies, and the compassion that never fails; the goodness that makes us wonder, and the holiness that makes heaven thrill;—all this does not come home to a sinner's heart like the sorrow at Gethsemane, and the dying groan on the cross. We can say with the worshipping hosts above us, and almost tremble as we say it, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty!" but if we want a song that will call forth every power of our souls, and bring into action every feeling of our hearts, we must take up the language of the ransomed Paul, "He loved us and gave himself for us."

Place the cross in what light we may, there is no exaggerating of its importance or its power. As the basis of love, nothing even in heaven is like it. In the very presence of Christ, in the full splendour of his glory and all the unveiled brightness of his perfections, they that see him as he is, ground on it their warmest affections and their loudest praise. It is still, in their estimation, the Redeemer's highest claim on them; it constitutes his noblest worth. "Worthy," they cry, "is the Lamb that was slain to receive honour, and glory, and blessing." Death has not silenced the song they loved on earth; the glories of heaven have not changed it. They said then, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his

own blood, to him be glory and dominion." They say now, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

3. We learn also from this reiterated question, that *real love for Christ is of the very utmost importance to us*. He would not have made so much of a trifle, or of any thing not essential to our happiness.

And yet what is love? It is nothing more than a feeling. Its importance arises from the place it holds in the mind, and the influence it exercises over all its operations, over every other feeling, every thought and movement. It is the spring of action. All we do comes more or less under its power. It is one of those feelings that assume the character of principles. It is, in fact, the strongest of all principles, and capable of producing the greatest results.

No wonder therefore that when Christ brings a sinner to his feet, the first thing he asks him for there, is his heart; one of the first things he takes, is his love. We must love him. Love for him is not an ornament; it is not a right thing merely, an offering in which Christ delights and to which he has a special claim; it is a necessary thing; it is essential to the Christian character; it is the very life and soul of all true religion.

It is religion itself, its foundation, its spring, its strength, its perfection, its glory. Without love, we can perform none of the duties of religion, never taste one of its consolations, never be capable of forming even a conception of its eternal joys. Be Christians without it? Brethren, you might as easily breathe, and have nothing to do with air; as well talk of being living men, without a body or a soul. Love is no arbitrary demand of heaven. Its importance, its necessity, both lie in the very nature of things. God must annihilate the religion of his Son, leave not one particle of it undestroyed in his wide creation, before any one of us can be disciples of Christ without a supreme love for Christ; before he can alter this declaration of his Spirit, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." Such a man is accursed. The very want of this love is his curse. It is a want of every thing that can rescue, and ennoble, and bless.

4. There is another inference to be drawn from this enquiry;—*Our love for Christ is sometimes questionable and ought to be questioned.*

Some of us perhaps object to this conclusion. We ask, "Who does not love his blessed Lord?" We say that the man is no better than a heathen, whose love for him is for one moment doubtful. But look here, brethren. Peter, the apostle; Peter, the most zealous, warm-hearted, of all the

apostles; the man who had felt willing to die for his Master, and had actually drawn his sword against an armed band of soldiers in his defence; this man is singled out by Christ to have his love for him called publicly into question, is asked by Christ, and at a time when his soul could hardly hold the love he cherished for him, whether he had any real love for him at all. "Jesus saith unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?"

No matter then what we feel or have felt, no matter how much the Saviour has honoured us or how much he has enabled us to honour him, we must be willing to have the state of our minds towards him looked into; we must be anxious to look into it ourselves; not shrinking away from the probe, not restless under our neighbour's scrutiny or our own, but willing to come into the light, desiring nothing more than to get into the light, thankful to every minister or friend who forces us to ask ourselves whether we love Christ or not, and never so thankful to him, as when we are stirred up to the closest self-examination. O what a happy people should we be, if every one of us were often to leave this house of God enquiring and praying! Some of us might lose for a time a little peace of mind, others still more of self-complacency; but what are these things worth when enquiry disturbs them, when thought shakes them, when prayer annihilates them?

Better to lose every peaceful, every pleasurable feeling we know, every comfort we enjoy, and every earthly good we hope for, than live deceived; than die with nothing but "a lie in our right hands," mistaking a shadow for a substance, a name for a reality, a shew of godliness for its power.

II. We come now, in the second place, to *the answer which Peter gave to the enquiry of his Lord.*

From this we infer at once that it is a question which may be answered. It is not only possible, but, under some circumstances, comparatively easy to answer it; and that in the midst of infirmities, and sins, and all those humiliating and perplexing feelings connected with a remembrance of sin. Thrice said Christ to Peter, "Lovest thou me?" and thrice Peter answered with promptitude and firmness, that he did love him. It mattered not how low he had fallen, how grievously he had sinned, how cutting a sense he still had of his transgressions, or how pointedly he had been re-proved; he meets the question without one moment's shrinking; he appeals to him who, he was aware, well knew his heart and was thus wounding it by his reiterated enquiries; he says with all that consciousness of sincerity which heart-felt love inspires, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

How then, under similar circumstances, may we come to a similar answer? In other words, how may a man discover in himself, amidst convictions of sin, shame and sorrow on account of it, real love for his Saviour?

1. We love him *when we mourn bitterly for our sins against him.*

Nothing pains a feeling heart more than to offend causelessly a heart it loves, and when that provocation is gross and repeated, and yet forgiven, and passed over, and to all appearance forgotten, none but ourselves can tell how keen and almost intolerable the recollection of it becomes. Forgiveness cannot wear our pain away, kindness cannot dissipate it; they sometimes rather aggravate than remove it. Now sin is an offence against Christ. It is, like Peter's crime, a denial of him, a dishonour done to him, a shameful and execrable thing. The heart therefore that loves Christ, bitterly deplores its transgressions. It is conscious of a treachery, and ingratitude, and baseness, which make it loathsome to itself. It can hardly bear with its own vileness. It is more than saddened, it is sometimes racked, with a feeling of its desperate wickedness. Go out once in his life, like Peter, and weep bitterly? Such a man at times can hardly weep at all; his sorrow for his sin overwhelms him. It can be expressed only in misery and prayer.

Are any of you, brethren, men of this stamp? Are you often, and deeply, and secretly, deploring your turpitude and guilt? Is sin against Christ, against redeeming grace and saving mercy, your sorest affliction, your keenest sorrow? Then you love him. You could not have a surer mark of a holy affection for him. The songs of heaven, could they come from your lips, would not say more plainly, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

2. We love Christ *when we are especially on our guard against a repetition of those sins where-with we have dishonoured him.*

Every man has his besetting evil; some sin, into which, owing to his natural disposition, or habits, or circumstances, he is most prone to fall. Peter's was self-confidence. Our Lord accordingly tries him in this weak point. He had said before that though all the other apostles should forsake their Master, he never would; no, he would rather die with him, than deny him. He has now a fair opportunity of making the same declaration again. He is almost invited to make it. "Simon, son of Jonas," asks the Saviour, "lovest thou me more than these?" "I have shewn thee greater favour than I have shewn to these thy brethren; I have pardoned in thee greater sins: hast thou for me greater love?" But Peter would not be overcome a second time. With a deep humility, with an

admirable forbearance and self-command, he waves that part of the question altogether. No more catching at an opportunity for display, he makes no pretensions to a warmer love than his fellow-disciples possessed, but says what from his inmost soul he knew and felt to be true, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee."

A similar spirit in us will warrant a similar conclusion. You have fallen perhaps, brethren, into some heavy transgression, some mournful error of heart or life. It has pleased God to shew you your guilt. Now if you have no true love for the Lord Jesus, nothing is more easy than to tell you how you will act. You will be disgusted, it may be, with yourselves for an hour or a day, and then the first favourable opportunity that presents itself, you will fall again into the very sin which you profess to deplore. And thus, unless God interferes, you will go on to your dying day—your conscience struggling against your practice, and then again your practice wounding your conscience; your mind never at rest, and your conduct never decided, and your character ever doubtful. But take a man who really loves his Lord, and overcome him by temptation; lead him, in some unguarded hour, to act contrary to his high and holy calling; and then mark his conduct. He will ever after shun you, and he will shun every approach to that sin into which

you have drawn him. There will be no reasoning with you about the matter, no more tampering with it; no more asking, "How far can I go? How near may I approach evil?" He says now, "How far can I get away?" There will be a hatred of the accursed thing; there will be kept up in that man's heart a spirit of watchfulness and prayer against it, a determination to avoid it, which the world may ridicule and the great tempter assail, but which, by God's help, neither earth nor hell can shake. And this proves the reality of his love. It establishes the uprightness of his character. It warrants him again to say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

3. We may be assured that we love the Saviour, *when no sin, no sorrow on account of sin, no state of mind whatsoever, can keep us from his feet.*

Do we love a fellow-creature? We long to be with him. If our love for him is ardent, separation from him is painful; we overcome difficulties in order to get into contact with him, and when in his society, his mere presence becomes a source of pleasure. A real attachment for Christ acts towards Christ precisely in this way. The soul thirsts for him; it longs to be with him, to have some consciousness of his presence with it, and some communion with his Spirit. Nor does a sense of guilt long or materially interrupt this

desire. For a moment perhaps or an hour, it may cause a man to dread his Bible, his closet, or his knees; but where love is, this dread is soon over. The soul again turns to its redeeming Saviour, turns to him with deeper emotions and stronger desires than it ever knew before; enquires for him, laments after him, would give up ten thousand worlds if it had them, once more to repose in its former assurance of his pardon and sense of his favour.

We might have supposed that after such conduct as Peter had exhibited, we should have heard no more of him; that he would have concealed himself and his shame far from his fellow-disciples amidst the mountains and lakes of Galilee; but this man was the first in his Master's forsaken grave, he manifested a stronger desire than any of his brethren, to be again by his side. Behold him as he is represented in the beginning of this chapter. Several of the disciples were fishing together on the sea of Tiberias. The Lord came and stood near them on the shore. After a while, John, the beloved disciple, recognizes him. "It is the Lord," he says to Peter. The next moment Peter plunges into the sea, and is at his Master's feet. James, and John, and Thomas, and the rest of them, can row their boats and drag their nets calmly and leisurely, but what are nets and boats to this pardoned, contrite, fervent soul? He

"loved much, for much had been forgiven" him, and regardless of every thing else, he springs at once to his beloved Lord.

It is well with us when sorrow for sin leads us to Christ, when tears lead to prayers, when nights of weeping and of shame become nights of thirsting after God and his forgiving mercy.

And now, men and brethren, turn to yourselves. How stands the case with you? If the risen Jesus should put this question to each of you this day, "Lovest thou me?" could you return him Peter's answer? could you say, "Lord, I do love thee? Thou who knowest all things, knowest that I love thee?"

You must be aware that in the evidences of attachment to Christ which have now been mentioned to you, we could not well have taken lower ground. The Bible speaks of keeping God's commandments, of a resolute devotedness to his service in heart and life, and insists on that as the best evidence of love for him; but you have heard of nothing more to-day than a sorrow for sin, a dread of sin, an earnest seeking for a Saviour. If you are destitute of these things, be assured that you are equally destitute of any true regard for the Being who made you, the Redeemer who bled for you, the God who will be your Judge. Love can never be separated from its natural

fruits and effects. A dead faith is an absurdity; a dead, inoperative love is tenfold more absurd. A love without power or feeling, a love that seldom thinks of its object, that never delights in him, that can offend him without compunction, and live estranged from him without sorrow, and would not lose one atom of its happiness if he were annihilated;—can you seriously call this a real love for such a Being as the Lord Christ? Can you for one moment think that he who commands you to love him with all your heart, and soul, and strength, will accept or acknowledge it? Offer it to your friend, tender it to any of your fellow-worms;—there is not one of them who would not reject it with scorn, and give you in return for it his pity or contempt. And ought that to pass for a supreme love to God, which would not pass for common friendship among men? Will that love do for heaven, which is not good enough for earth?

Brethren, your safety lies in coming to a conviction of this fact, not that your love for the Saviour is imperfect, weak, and cold; but that you have no love at all for him; that you are actually in a state of enmity against him and his ways, an enmity concealed from yourselves perhaps under a form of religion or the decencies of life, never hinted at by your neighbours, but as real, and as deadly, and, unless you take heed, as per-

manent, as sin can make it. It is deeply seated in your nature. No power but the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost, can root it out. A new heart is as necessary for you, as your daily food, more needful than air or light. Of all the things you ever heard of, you need it the most. May a gracious God lead you to seek it!

To you, brethren, who really love the Lord Jesus Christ, and who, notwithstanding your occasional misgivings, have good evidence of your love for him, how sweet must be the consciousness of this affection! It is not an unrequited love. It is the effect of such a love for you existing in the divine mind, as could satisfy ten thousand hearts, such a love as you have sought perhaps all your life long on earth, and never found. It is more; it is stronger and warmer. No created mind can comprehend it. You cannot fathom its depth, you can scarcely form a conception of its tenderness, you can set no bounds to its activity, you will never see its end.

And then add to this blessed truth yet another. Your love for Christ not only springs out of his love to you, he condescends to speak of it as, in its turn, drawing forth his affection, and bringing him nearer to you. "If any man will love me," he says, "my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Here is a promise of the divine presence with

you in this world ; and, dark as the world is, what more can you desire ? Christ in heaven makes heaven a world of joy, and Christ in the soul, be it where it may, is the soul's happiness and rest. Beyond this world, your blessedness is sure. Love is the one grand qualification for the enjoyment of God. It gives the soul a capability of entering into the pursuits of his kingdom, it opens the heart to its joys. It becomes therefore something more to the Christian than a duty, a distinction, a source of unutterable delight ; it is a warrant and foretaste of heaven. A righteous God will never exclude from that blessed world one among his creatures, to whom he has first given a desire, a relish, a meetness, for its happiness. It is a world of love. If you can be happy in it, you will assuredly see it ; you will receive in it that "crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

SERMON XI.

THE PLAGUE IN THE WILDERNESS.

NUMBERS xvi. 48.

He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stayed.

THE dead here referred to consisted of a fearful multitude. "They that died," says the next verse, "were fourteen thousand and seven hundred." And they appear to have all died instantaneously and in a mass. The plague came upon them as they were gathered together in one immense assembly around the tabernacle in the wilderness, not attacking them one by one, and sending them home to sicken and die in their tents, but sweeping them down where they stood. Its touch was death. "Get you up from among this congregation," said the Lord to Moses, "that I may consume them as in a moment." The next mo-

ment we hear the agitated Moses crying to Aaron, "Go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them, for there is wrath gone out from the Lord; the plague is begun."

And why this rapid and tremendous judgment? To answer this question, let us look, in the first place, at the origin of this plague; and then, that we may have another instance of the divine mercy fixed in our memories, let us pass on to its cessation.

I. To say that this evil had *its origin* in sin, would be to say nothing. All evil proceeds from sin. There is not a pang or sorrow in the universe, which has not this vile thing as its source. But then suffering owes its existence to sin in various ways. Sometimes it is sent in mercy to prevent sin. Paul has a thorn in the flesh "lest he should be exalted;" and our blessings are often snatched away from us, lest we should turn them into idols. At other times, it comes to discover sin and subdue it in the Christian's heart. "Before I was afflicted," says David, "I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes." More frequently however its design is to answer the purposes of God's moral government, to punish sin; to manifest the ab-

horrence in which the great Ruler of the universe holds it, and thus to deter his creatures from its commission. And such was its object here. The Israelites had sinned against the Lord, this plague was the punishment of their sin.

And now perhaps, brethren, we are ready to set these men before us as guilty of some enormous crime, as monsters of iniquity; but look to the history. The only offence we find recorded against them amounted to this, and no more than this—they had murmured, and that not against God, but against Moses and Aaron, men like themselves. How different often is sin from what sin appears! It seems a very trifle, an affront offered to a mere fellow-worm; but it strikes at the Holy One of Israel. Strip it of its disguise, it comes out disobedience, enmity, rebellion, against the King of kings.

1. This sin involved in it, first, *an overlooking of God's providence*; at all events, a refusing to acknowledge it.

“Ye have killed the people of the Lord,” said the Israelites to Moses and Aaron. Nothing could be more untrue. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, had excited a rebellion in the camp. Contrary to the divine appointment, one of them had aspired to the priesthood in the church, the others to supreme sway in the state. God would not bear this violation of his authority. He wrought im-

mediately two miracles to shew his indignation. The earth first opened her mouth, and swallowed up Dathan and Abiram with their families; and then "there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense" with Korah.

Now some, in our day, would have resolved all this into accident. It would have been represented by them as a distressing casualty. They would have talked to us of natural causes; and though no causes at all adequate to the effect could be found, yet something in nature would have been discovered or imagined and then magnified, till God and his agency, miracle and judgment, had all disappeared. The Israelites acted not thus; but they acted in a like spirit. "This desolation," they said, "is the work of Moses and Aaron. It comes out of tyranny and priestcraft." They charged their rulers with destroying the people, instead of tracing their destruction to an offended God. And hence God laid bare his arm. To vindicate his own providence, to force the nation to see that he had been the author of the judgments they had witnessed, he strikes a blow which no mortal arm could have inflicted; so rapid, so destructive, so awful, that unbelief itself must be compelled to ascribe it to his omnipotent hand. In a moment, fourteen thousand of them shiver and drop in the wilderness.

We must take heed, brethren, how we push God out of his own world. He really is its Governor. He is as much the source of the natural evils that lay it waste, as of the mercies that gladden it. And he is determined to be seen and acknowledged as such. "I am the Lord," says he by his prophet Isaiah, "and there is none else." "I form the light and create darkness. I make peace and create evil. I the Lord do all these things." "The Lord is known," says the psalmist—his existence, his authority, his providence, all are known—"by the judgment which he executeth." We may go farther yet. He claims for himself as its author, the woe that is appalling even an eternal world. He will be recognized as the builder of hell itself. "Tophet is ordained of old," says the prophet; "he hath made it deep and large; the pile thereof is fire and much wood;" and then he adds, "the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it." The wrath that burns in eternity, is called "the wrath of the Lamb." It is described as coming from that very Saviour who is enthroned in the heavens in a form of mercy, and is the light, and life, and glory, of that world of joy. These are awful declarations, but they are as true as they are awful. Happy for us if we are willing to acknowledge their truth. We must come to this acknowledgment in the end. God will not allow us to

say for ever, "Accident brought this evil to me, chance this disease, a casualty this bereavement, the injustice or treachery of my fellow-man this loss and penury." Either by his Spirit, or by his providence, or by both, he will drive this atheism out of us. He will force us to say, "It is the Lord. He is in this place, and I knew it not. Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth."

2. The murmuring of these sinners included in it also *a daring censure of God's ways*.

Whatever God does bears the impress of God. In some way or other, it manifests his perfections, and consequently is calculated to bring honour to his name. Now a mind in a right state praises him for every work of his hands; and it does this on account of the traces of him, in other words, the moral glory it either discovers in that work, or, though hidden, believes to be there. And this is God's great design in all his doings, to extort praise from his creatures by revealing to them his excellencies, and thus to surround himself with a delighted and adoring universe. It follows then, that to censure any of God's ways is, as far as in us lies, to frustrate the object at which God aims, to rob him of his honour; and worse than this, to asperse his character and vindicate his enemies. It is charging him with unfitness for his office, representing him as unworthy of his throne; it is the lifting up of a rebel's arm against

the world's King, an effort to uncrown him. And of this offence these Israelites were guilty. They do not indeed expressly say that Korah and his companions were unjustly destroyed, but they plainly intimate that such was the fact. They stand up for them; they honour them by calling them "the people of the Lord;" they manifest a secret approbation of their offence, and an open regret at their doom. When the Egyptians were overwhelmed, they made the shores of the Red Sea re-echo with their song of praise. Then the Lord, they said, "had triumphed gloriously;" "he was glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders." They appear to have set no bounds to their exulting adoration. But these Egyptians were their enemies; now their companions, and friends, and relatives, have perished beneath Jehovah's arm, and no matter how guilty the men were, how closely resembling in their impiety and presumption Pharaoh and his host, their overthrow is an injury done to the nation; it is injustice, cruelty, murder: "the people murmured."

All this was natural, but it was not right. Let nature say what it will, let the feelings of an anguished heart prompt what they may, "the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works;" as righteous, and holy, and perhaps as gracious too, in those very judgments which desolate our families and wring our souls, as in

the mercies which come to us the most undisguised and yield us the greatest joy. We must strive to glorify him for both. Christian charity indeed "rejoiceth not in iniquity," she takes no pleasure in witnessing pain and misery; like her divine Lord, she weeps over a dying world, and she mourns over a burning hell; yet, consistently with herself, she may exult in the suppression of triumphant wickedness; she may, she does, she must, adore her God for putting down his foes. They are mischievous in his creation; they are scattering around the seeds of misery and death; and mercy to a suffering world constrains him to crush their power. Many of us dislike to hear the term "justice" applied to God, for we attach to it the idea of something malignant and vindictive in the divine mind; but in such a world as ours, or in any world, a benevolent ruler must be a just ruler, he must make distinctions between the evil and the good, he must not dare to "bear the sword in vain." Place a God of love on a throne, and he becomes, he must become, a God of justice; his love compels him to arm his right hand with vengeance, and to make the workers of iniquity feel its stroke. A governor who would treat alike order and disorder, vice and virtue, could not reign long over one petty kingdom of the earth, could not rule a single parish of our own kingdom, no, nor a single house. How much

less this huge world ! a mighty universe ! a crowded earth and an almost boundless heaven !

Look up to Jehovah's own peaceful dwelling place. It is a region of the purest, the most intense and unfailing love ; the birth-place of love, its home ; but mark how the just judgments of the Lord are regarded there. In the eighteenth chapter of the Revelation of Saint John, the fall of Babylon is predicted. It is to be sudden, complete, final. And what is to follow ? On earth, lamentation and mourning over her fate. The kings of the earth are described as "bewailing" her ; the merchants of the earth "weep" over her ; the people who had come in ships to her borders, "cry and cast dust on their heads," when they see her smoke. Nothing is heard on every side but, "Alas, alas, that great city Babylon ! that mighty city !" The whole world appears ready to break out into open indignation and murmuring at the severity of her doom. And now go up into heaven. There not a tear is shed over her desolation, not a complaint is uttered. One moment, as she sinks into ruin, there seems to be a silence of awe and wonder ; the next, a burst of praise. "A great voice of much people is heard in heaven, saying, Alleluia ! Salvation, and glory, and honour, unto the Lord our God ; for true and righteous are his judgments." And again they said, "Alleluia !" And a third time the cry

is raised, "Alleluia !" And even then the adoration of heaven has not reached its height. "A voice," says the wondering John, "came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great." And then comes the mighty chorus of heaven's song; "I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." "So let all thine enemies perish, O God; but let them that love thee, be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."

3. There was yet a third evil comprehended in the murmuring of these Israelites; and this was *a contempt of God's warnings*.

The judgments they had lately seen inflicted on their countrymen, were of a very awful character. Even in that age of wonders, a gaping earth and descending flames were no ordinary or trifling occurrences. Their object was evident. It was to remove evil out of the camp, and to warn the whole nation against discontent and rebellion. Eleazar, the son of Aaron, is accordingly told to take up the censers in which some of the offenders had dared to burn incense, and to make of them "broad plates for a covering of the altar." In this situation, they were to be "a sign," a conspicuous and fearful memorial, "to the children

of Israel" of the divine indignation. And what regard did they pay to this sign and to the terrible judgments it represented? Did they tremble, and weep, and set aside days and weeks to humble themselves and pray? "On the morrow," the very next day, "all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured." The earth had scarcely closed over some of their companions, the embers of the fire that had consumed others, were hardly extinguished, the memorial of their crime and its punishment had been fastened but a few hours on the altar, when the whole camp was again in a revolt. The glory of the Lord appeared as before above the tabernacle; the destroying angel, they well knew, dwelt in that pillar of fire; but they heeded them not. Judgments, and warnings, and portents, and prodigies, were nothing to them. They gathered themselves together, just as they had done on the former occasion, against Moses and Aaron, and braved all the vengeance of heaven.

And this is human nature, brethren. This is the nature that every one of us inherits, that you and I perhaps still possess unaltered and unsubdued; the very nature which thousands around us extol as rational, and upright, and noble; which it is fanaticism to describe as ruined, and folly to represent as depraved. O that we may never pass a single day of our lives without fer-

vently praying that this nature in us may be renewed and changed ! O that we may long for nothing so much as to have done with this nature, to be in a world where its madness works no more ! Here it can withstand any thing. It can harden itself against any mercy, despise any threatening, make light of, nay, forget, and forget in an hour, any judgment. It can trifle amidst the most appalling terrors of Jehovah's providence. It can sport on the borders of the grave, and take its ease on the very brink of destruction.

A careless observer of his fellow-creatures finds it hard to credit the history of the Jewish nation in the wilderness. He deems it an extravagant, overcharged portrait. Or if he regards it as, in the main, a faithful narrative, he looks on the people it describes as standing alone, removed as far away from all other men in folly and crime, as they were in mercies and privileges. Never, he thinks, could infatuation so strange be found elsewhere on the earth, never perverseness so monstrous, never wickedness so daring. But the man who has learned any thing of his own heart, entertains no such notion. He reads in his own history, he sees in his own breast, a counterpart to Israel's madness and Israel's guilt. He feels that he has a thousand times done the same things that this sinful nation did, and under circumstances which appear to him as aggravated. Have you never

overlooked the divine providence, brethren ; ascribing to misfortune and accident the work of God ? Have you never reasoned or talked as though the Lord of the heavens had abandoned his throne, and turned loose his wide dominions to the reign of chance ? Have you also never sat in judgment on God's ways, and wondered at their severity ? never censured his doings, and murmured against them as unmerciful, if not unjust ? Which of us has not despised his warnings, trembling one day at his judgments and making light of them the next ? in the hour of sickness and affliction, resolving that the world shall no longer engross our affections and waste our strength ; and then in the day of health and quiet, nay, before that day, while yet smarting under the consequences of disease or calamity, breaking these resolutions, forgetting all we have seen and felt and promised, and becoming again as much like our former selves, as much like the rest of mankind, as much like Israel of old, as though we had never seen Jehovah's outstretched arm, as though sickness, and death, and sorrow, had never entered our houses, or come near our world ?

And is all this to go on for ever ? No ; God will not bear with it. " There is wrath gone out from the Lord " against us, " the plague is begun." A sentence of death has been passed upon every soul of man. Millions of our race have already

perished. The destroying angel is hastening to cut down millions more. The world some of us deem so fair and happy, is nothing better than the camp of Israel—a scene of mercy, it is true, but yet a scene of rebellion, misery, terror, and death. How anxious then should we be to look around for a deliverer! Blessed be God, there is one near. This history speaks of him.

II. Consider, in the second place, *the cessation of the pestilence.*

1. The first remark we make concerning this relates to its Author. *It was effected by one who might have been supposed least likely to interfere for such a purpose.*

The rebellion of this perverse people was directed against Moses and Aaron. They were the objects of their murmurs, and appeared in danger of falling victims to their fury. But one of these became the instrument of their safety. Aaron was the man who turned away from them the divine indignation. No sooner did he see the peril they were in, than “he ran into the midst of the congregation;” “he stood,” we read, “between the dead and the living, and the plague was stayed.”

And can we fail, brethren, to discover here the great High Priest of God’s guilty church, the despised and rejected Jesus? Aaron was a type

of him. The scriptures often speak of him in this character, and in this character he acted, and must be viewed, at this time. Now just as these trembling Jews found in him an intercessor and deliverer, so may we, in the midst of our rebellion and sufferings, find in Christ Jesus a Mediator and Saviour. Like them, we have provoked the Most High to anger by our transgressions; we have forced a God of mercy to become a God of vengeance; but as in their case, so in ours, deliverance comes from the very source whence we might well look for destruction. God himself has provided for us a Saviour. Nay, he himself has become our Saviour. He tells us that "he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all;" this Son however was none other than God himself. It was the everlasting Jehovah, who became "manifest in the flesh," who appeared in our world as "the man Christ Jesus," and, "while we were yet enemies," wrought out for us an "eternal redemption." The work was all his own. We had no more to do with it than we had with laying the foundations of the earth or building the skies.

And it is the same now. The offers of mercy, the overtures of peace, the promises of forgiveness and salvation, that are sent to us day by day, come from the very Being whom of all beings we have most wronged, the order and beauty of whose

creation we have marred, whose glory we have tarnished, whose providence we have sometimes denied and sometimes censured, whose warnings we have a thousand times mocked and are mocking still. We admire the forbearance of Moses as he falls down on the earth and prays for his reviling countrymen, we wonder at the forgiving spirit of Aaron as he hastens to save them; but think, brethren, of Golgotha and Calvary. O what forbearance was that which restrained an omnipotent arm amidst contumely and insults, such as even the abject things that offered them had scarcely merited; which cried, under the most cruel wrongs the earth ever inflicted, in the bitterest agony the earth ever bore, "Father, forgive them!" And think of the right hand of Jehovah. We are offending every moment the exalted Redeemer who sits there, but his work of mercy, his wonderful work, still goes on. It is as true of him now as in the first moment he ascended his throne, that "he ever liveth to make intercession for us." We have still the same Advocate with the Father as he in whom the beloved John confided; the same High Priest in the heavens as he in whom Paul of old gloried—"Christ, the righteous;" "Jesus, the Son of God."

2. *The cessation of this plague in the wilderness was attended with a display of the most self-denying and ardent love.*

There is a love that professes much and will perhaps bear something for its object, but will do very little. It is not active; it does not bestir itself; there is nothing of what the Bible calls "the labour of love" about it. It is a sentiment, rather than a principle. We may find such love every day in our world. But the love of Aaron for Israel was not of this kind. "Go quickly unto the congregation," said Moses to him; and how did he act? He might have pleaded the apparent uselessness of such a measure, its inconsistency with the dignity of his character, its positive danger. The enraged people, could they get him into their power, might wreak their vengeance on him as the author of their calamities, or the plague might infect him and sweep him down with the rest. Nothing however of this kind moved him, or, as far as we can see, even occurred to him. Losing sight of every selfish consideration, he rushed at once amidst the perishing throng. He took his station in a moment amidst pestilence and death. "He stood," a messenger of mercy, "between the dead and the living," self-devoted, undismayed, absorbed in one object; a determined, reckless friend of these guilty men.

What an example for ministers of the gospel! What a reproof of our coldness of heart, and love of ease, and despicable self-indulgence! Pray for us, brethren, that we may resemble this Aaron;

that we may catch something of the self-denial and ardour of this devoted priest. But still, we may ask, what was he? When compared with his heavenly Master, he was nothing. We must again look higher; we must again look through Aaron to Aaron's Lord.

There is a pestilence raging in our world, a widely spread and deadly pestilence; the most tremendous evil the creation knows, fatal alike to the body and the soul. None in the world has escaped it; none in the world can stay, or cure, or even ameliorate it. Heaven has accordingly come to our relief. A stupendous scheme of deliverance was formed there in our behalf; a scheme whereby Jehovah's honour and our salvation were made to meet, the Lawgiver magnified, and yet the submissive transgressor rescued. Now whence did this scheme originate? In precisely the same feeling that placed the Jewish high priest between the dead and living—in compassion, in love, in pure benevolence. There was nothing in man, that merited it; nothing in the nature of things, that led one step towards it; nothing in the circumstances in which God was placed, or the character which God sustained, that demanded it. It sprang, in all its amazing glory, out of the depths of the divine love, startling the universe with its unlooked for and unparalleled grace.

And how did he who was destined to carry

this scheme into effect, execute his strange commission? It involved on his part not condescension only, not danger merely, but degradation and suffering such as never before had been thought of, and a death so beset with terrors, that the guiltiest sinner that ever died, knows not their fearfulness. Yet look into the records of his life. We see there no backwardness to enter on his work, no timidity or shrinking in carrying it on. "Lo, I come," he says, "to do thy will, O God;" and then he descends from the realms of glory to this abode of vileness, from a happy heaven to a wretched earth, with greater readiness than ever monarch stepped up to his throne. He enters fearlessly the polluted and dying camp, he mingles almost joyfully among the stricken thousands; and when there, he utters no complaint, he breathes no sigh for his own pure and glorious kingdom. "My meat," he says, and says it in a sinner's form in a sinner's world, "my refreshment and my joy," "is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." He speaks of himself as "straitened till it should be accomplished." And when the hour of his final agony approached, O what a triumph of constancy and love was there! We cannot understand it. We see enough in him at Gethsemane to discover that the travail of his soul could have exhausted the strength and patience of all the hosts of angels; we see enough

of him on the cross to assure us that nothing could overcome his. But his love "passeth knowledge." It was the spring of all he did and all he suffered. These, in their extent and importance, go far beyond our comprehension, and we can say no more of the feeling that prompted them, than that it is, like himself, unfathomable; as much above the love of mortals, as the highest heavens are above the earth.

3. We may make yet another remark. *The cessation of this plague was brought about by means that seemed altogether inadequate, that appeared to have no connection at all with the end proposed.*

The evil to be stopped was a pestilence, a most rapid and fatal disease. A thoughtful bystander, taking into his consideration all the mournful circumstances of the case, would probably have said, "Human means of aid are all hopeless here. This is evidently an infliction from offended heaven, and nothing but the mercy and power of heaven can remove it. All that man can do, is to humble himself and cry for pardon." In this judgment and in this feeling, the two Jewish rulers appear to have participated. When the Lord told them of the coming judgment, "they fell," we are told, "upon their faces," their frequent attitude of supplication. But, observe, neither the fervour nor the humiliation of their prayers altered the divine purpose. While they

were on the ground, and undoubtedly wrestling there with God for the people, the plague began spreading around them terror and desolation. And now notice their conduct. "Take a censer," says Moses to Aaron, "and put fire therein from off the altar," the altar of burnt-offering, thus connecting the measure about to be adopted with a sacrifice, "and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them." "And Aaron," we read, "took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation, and, behold, the plague was begun among the people; and he put on incense and made an atonement." Now it is natural to ask, what connection could there possibly be between a raging pestilence and this burning censer? How could the one be affected by the other? A thoughtful bystander again might have deemed Aaron, as he ran forward with his incense, either woefully superstitious or bereft of his reason in his panic. The people might have been expected to deride or curse him for this mockery of relief. But this feeble man stood, with this seemingly powerless censer, "between the dead and the living, and the plague was stayed." The moment he reached the spot, the arm of vengeance was arrested. Disease and death proceeded irresistibly till they came to his feet, but they could not advance one hair's breadth beyond him. On the one side of

him was a spectacle of ghastly horror, none of the people remained alive ; on the other side, a scene of deliverance, and safety, and wonder, and praise. And all this effected, not without prayer, but yet not by prayer—in this strange manner, by perfume sprinkled by a priest on fire taken from off an altar.

Bring this matter home to yourselves, brethren. You are often told of a way in which your sins may be pardoned, your sorrows lightened, and your souls saved. You know well what this way is. He who came so freely, and interposed so wonderfully, between us and death, gave his own soul an offering for sin ; he made an atonement, a propitiation, for it. He went farther than Aaron ; he became the victim, the sacrifice, as well as the priest. God makes known to you elsewhere in his word, what this history fails to discover, how you may appropriate to yourselves the benefit of this atonement. He tells you that a simple faith in his testimony concerning this Intercessor, will save your souls ; that a simple reliance on the efficacy of his atoning death, hope what you will from it, will never disappoint you ; that you may have “redemption,” a complete, and lasting, and glorious redemption, “through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” He tells you too that you can have this redemption in no other way ; that humiliation, and tears, and prayers, that all

you can do, or suffer, or feel, or think of, will never rescue you ; will never, without this simple faith in this sacrifice, better your condition an atom, but leave you with the curse of a merciful God on you in this world, and the wrath of the Lamb for your inheritance in the next.

Now some of you are staggered at this easy method of salvation. It does not commend itself to your judgments. You try in vain to see the reasonableness of it. There is no connection in it, as far as you can discover, between the cause and the effect. Nay, it appears to you perhaps an absurdity ; an insult alike on your understandings and your feelings ; as unworthy of the character of God, as it is degrading to your own. You do not hesitate therefore to reject, and, it may be, to scorn and deride it. I will not pause to ask you, can that man know much of real religion, who despises that in which God declares he glories ? Can he be in the way to heaven, prepared and meet for it, who pours contempt on a scheme of mercy which is evidently the contemplation, the song, the praise, the exultation, of heaven ? I would rather say, examine the history of these Jews. Where can you find any great deliverance vouchsafed them, any one signal mercy given them, which did not reach them in some strange manner, which was not brought about by means that you must deem utterly inadequate, which did not spring

out of a source whence they could previously have expected no deliverance, no mercy whatsoever? The stopping of a plague by the censer of Aaron had nothing unprecedented in its character: it was in accordance with the whole history of the people. The blow of a rod first divides a sea for their deliverance, and then brings water from a rock for them in their thirst. A glance at an image of brass heals thousands of their deadly wounds. Their food for forty years drops from the clouds. All is opposed to our ordinary observation and experience; all is what you would call unaccountable, unreasonable, absurd. And yet you profess to believe the Bible, and the Bible says, this is all fact, all truth. What becomes then of your objection to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? I mean, to that view of the gospel, which ascribes the recovery, the pardon, the purity, the blessedness, the salvation, of an immortal soul, entirely to the cross? to faith in its efficacy, a discovery of its glory, and an experience of its power? O that you could but be prevailed on to trust God! to trust the declarations of his faithful word, rather than the reasonings of your own benighted and half withered minds! O that you were willing to allow him the prerogative which he claims, and will exercise, and will vindicate too, of accomplishing his own ends of mercy by his own means, of covering himself

with glory while he surrounds you with happiness !

Ere long, brethren, there will be but one opinion amongst us on this point. Yet a little while, and a scene will be unfolded, which no unbelief can withstand or reasoning gainsay. Amidst a convulsed universe, we shall see him who once hung on a cross at Jerusalem and now offers us the free and glorious salvation he purchased there, not indeed occupying a station between the dead and the living, for we shall all live then as we have never lived yet ; he will stand between the two great, the two only divisions of the human race, the blessed and the accursed, the lost and the saved. On one side of him will be joy such as neither earth nor heaven has ever yet witnessed ; on the other, a spectacle that will make the destruction of Dathan and Abiram appear a trifle ; the fire that consumed Korah, scarcely worthy remembrance ; the plague that swept away the thousands of Israel, a thing of nought. Where shall we stand in that day ? On which side of the great High Priest of the heavens shall we be left, when the earth is no more ?

SERMON XII.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

ST. LUKE xvi. 22.

It came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom; the rich man also died.

THESE words bring before us a very solemn passage of scripture;—a parable only, it is true, a mere picture; but then it is a picture drawn by one who had lately come from the eternity it unfolds, and intended by him to shadow forth realities in that eternity, and those very realities among which you, and I, and every child of man, must soon be mixed. May God grant that the recollection of this fact may make us serious while we are examining it! May it cause us to feel, for one short hour at least, like dying men!

We cannot notice every part of the parable. Its general tendency however will be evident, if

we confine ourselves to this simple view of it;—first, the resemblance between the two persons who are the subjects of it, and, secondly, the difference between them, viewed in connection with the grounds of this difference.

I. 1. The parable speaks of a rich man and a poor man; and *the resemblance* between them may be traced, first, in *the mortality of their bodies*. They were both men, sinful men, and consequently dying men. No sooner is it said that “the beggar died,” than it is added, “the rich man also died.”

And thus, brethren, must end the history of us all. Whether we are poor or rich, in sickness or in health, in trouble or in joy, loved or despised, longing to die or cleaving to the earth as though nothing could tear us from it, this will soon be said concerning each of us, this will be the finishing, the winding up, of our earthly history, “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” One of us may die here and another there; one at this age and another at that; “one in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet, another in the bitterness of his soul, never eating with pleasure;” but we shall “all lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover us.”

2. These men were alike also in *the immortality of their souls*. They both went into eternity when

they died, and into eternity, brethren, we are all hastening. The soul of the poorest amongst us is as immortal as the soul of the richest, is of precisely the same value in the estimation of God, and the heir of the same boundless existence.

It is hard to believe this. Shew me a being enriched with intellect and refined by cultivation; let me see him capable of measuring the stars, or laying open the secrets of nature, or delighting his fellow-men by the creations of his fancy, or moving and swaying them by the force of his reasoning;—I can easily believe such a mind destined to live for ever. Or again let me think of the cross, and behold a fellow-sinner, however low in understanding or mean in station, cleaving to that cross; let me regard him as set apart by the everlasting Jehovah for his own, bought with the price of Christ's precious blood, and made the temple of the Holy Ghost; let him appear elevated above the world in spirit and conduct, and though treading the earth, walking with a high and a holy God, and holding communion with heaven;—I can believe without an effort, that there dwells within that man a spirit born for eternity. But whatever my feelings may say, the veriest trifle on the face of the globe is as immortal as he; the idolater will live as long, and so will the most sordid lover of the dust within these walls. As for intellect or science, it will not add a span to our duration.

The man whom we may think scarcely possessed of a human soul, who is treated as a brute beast, and degraded by the treatment he receives almost to a mental level with the brute beast, the most abject African that groans unpitied in western bondage, has a soul as immortal as a Newton, or a Milton, or a Locke; he will live as long as a David or a Paul. We may elevate or degrade our spirits, raise them through grace to Jehovah's image and Jehovah's happiness, or sink them down to the pollution and wretchedness of hell; but their duration is fixed; not a moment, not the twinkling of an eye, can we add to it; we cannot take away from it one atom of existence.

And observe too, that this eternity whither we are all going, is no far distant world which the disembodied soul will be ages or years in reaching. It is a world so near us, that the moment death separates the soul from the body, we shall be there, inhabitants of that world, entering into its pursuits and sharing its joys or pains. This fact is plainly intimated in the parable. Lazarus dies, and is carried at once "into Abraham's bosom." The rich man also dies. He is represented as closing his eyes one moment on earth, and then opening them the next in another world.

3. To these two points of resemblance between these men, we may add a third, not indeed absolutely expressed here, but, like the fact we have

just alluded to, evidently to be inferred;—*accountableness to God*. Though nothing is said of any trial or account which they underwent, the different situations in which we find them in eternity, implies one. It was not chance, which placed them where they are. They went thither from a bar of judgment; they are each of them occupying the place a righteous and impartial God has assigned them.

And judgment, brethren, is just as certain to you and me, as death or eternity; is as determinately, as inevitably appointed. As surely as we are now breathing the air, as surely as these frames of ours will one day lie cold in death, so surely shall we “stand at the judgment seat of Christ,” so certainly must “every one of us give account of himself to God.”

It follows then, not only that we shall live for ever in a world to come, but that our condition in it will depend on what has passed in the few fleeting years of our mortal life. This life is but a span long, a mere pittance of existence; short as it is, we trifle with it, and throw away many of its hours as though those hours were worthless; but what is this short life; this troubled, feverish dream, so trifling while it lasts, and so quickly ended? It is the beginning of an existence that will never end. And not only this, every moment in that existence will be affected by what has

passed in this beginning of it. The consequences of our words and actions are not terminated at the grave; they do not affect the three score years and ten of life only; no, they are connected with scenes which will take place millions of years to come; we shall be reaping their fruits ages and ages after the mountains are removed and the earth consumed. The sun will cease to rise and the stars to shine, but never, while eternity lasts, will the things we have thought and done to-day, and yesterday, and the days that were before them, become unimportant. Trifles we may deem them all on this side the grave, but no sooner does our foot tread on the other side, than their real character will come out: we shall see them as they are, the seeds of everlasting anguish, or the fore-runners of everlasting glory.

The rich man then resembled Lazarus in the mortality of his body, the immortality of his soul, and his accountableness to God.

II. Let us proceed to notice, secondly, *the difference between these two men, with the grounds or reasons of it.* They differed in two points.

1. In *their earthly portion.* The difference between them in this respect was indeed so great, that they hardly seemed to belong to the same order of beings. One was at the very height of worldly prosperity, enjoying, or at least possessing,

all that could minister to an earthly body or gratify an earthly, sensual mind. He "was clothed," we are told, "in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day." But look at his palace gate. There lies forsaken and despised "a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table;" so poor, that he wants the necessities of life; so starving, that he lies begging for the refuse of his neighbour's table; so well nigh naked, that he cannot cover the wounds which disfigure his famished body; so friendless, that when he is cast at the rich man's gate, he has none to relieve or help him; dogs his companions, and the food of dogs, not the food he possesses, but the food he craves. How great a contrast! Where shall we find its *origin*?

We know, brethren, where our earthly minds would prompt us to look for it. We are ready to say, "It must lie in the character or conduct of these men. That rich man has faithfully served his God, and is rewarded of him; that poor man has sinned grievously against him, and therefore groans and suffers." But one main design of this parable is to condemn such reasoning as this. It warns us against judging of men's character by men's condition. It tells us that ease and riches are no certain marks of God's favour, and poverty and suffering no sure signs of his displeasure. It

tells you who are rich, that your prosperity in your ways is perfectly consistent with God's hatred of those ways; and it tells you who are poor, and troubled, and perplexed, that notwithstanding all that is grieving you and bearing you down, you may be as dear to God as the throne he sits on, the redeemed of his Son, the chosen of his soul, and the heirs of his glory. That diversity of condition, which we may wonder at but cannot alter, which has prevailed more or less in every age and nation notwithstanding every attempt to put an end to it, that diversity must be traced to the sovereign will of God. And he suffers, or rather he establishes it, because it is conducive to our welfare and his own glory.

It serves to shew us, among other things, *the poverty of the world and the all-sufficiency of God*. One man, with all the earth can give at his command, pampered, and bowed down to, and half worshipped; and yet, in the midst of all this, dissatisfied, restless, and aching;—how does he make us feel the poverty, the nothingness, of all created good! While another man, poor as God can strip him, destitute of every thing the world deems good, and yet peaceful in his destitution, thankful, and almost happy, blessing the Lord that afflicts and kissing the hand that scourges him;—what does he shew us? He shews us this, that if we have the grace of Christ in our hearts, we

need covet nothing more ; we have enough ; we have found that out of created things, which no created things could supply. He shews us this, that an infinite God is a better portion than ten thousand empty, or, if we could find them, ten thousand crowded worlds.

Besides, this diversity of condition, this mixture of poverty and riches on the earth, answers a further end. *It proclaims to thoughtless man another world.*

Look at that daring contemner of the Lord Jehovah. He tramples on his laws, he despises his gospel ; and yet he prospers. Affluence and ease are his companions all his days, and when he dies, he dies before any visible token of the divine indignation has touched him : he quietly sinks down in a good old age among the treasure he has collected, and is gathered to his fathers. But look at that faithful servant of God. Not a year of his existence passes without some struggle. His whole life, it may be, is one continued effort to bear up under the pressure of penury or disease. It is a round of disappointments, bereavements, perplexities, sorrows. He bears about with him, while he lives, the visible traces of a man of sorrows ; and when he dies, he carries down to the grave a patient, but a half broken, worn out heart. " And where all this time is a righteous God ? " asks the soul. " Where his promised care of his

own, and where his oft threatened vengeance against transgressors?" "They lie," says the soul again, "in another world. There is a future state of retribution. There is, there must be, a world in which the just Governor of the universe will assert his justice, will vindicate his character, and render to the sons of men according to their works." And this is another truth enforced in this parable.

2. The two men it speaks of differed in *their eternal condition*.

Look, first, at the state of Lazarus in the invisible world. This is very briefly described. "It came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." What a transition! from the cold ground to the arms of angels, from the rich man's gate to the gate of heaven! now scarcely able to walk a miserable earth, and now riding on the wings of cherubim, and soaring upwards in triumph to the regions of light and happiness!

And what place is the man holding in these glorious regions? Is he laid down at the entrance of heaven, allowed to occupy the same post at the door of God's house, that he occupied before at the rich man's gate? Had this been all, his latter end would have been blessed. The fragments of the heavenly feast, a taste only of the joys of the redeemed, are enough to satisfy all the powers of any created spirit. But he is admitted, not to

the gate only, but into the palace of heaven ; he sits down a welcome and honoured guest at the table of his Lord. This is only intimated in the text, but the figure which implies it, is exceedingly beautiful and striking.

Heaven is often spoken of in the scriptures as a sumptuous banquet. It is called "a feast," "a great feast," "the marriage supper of the Lamb." Now among the eastern nations, it was usual, on occasions of peculiar festivity, to recline on couches during their meals ; and these were so situated, that each guest appeared to be leaning on the bosom or shoulder of the person next to him ; indeed at a crowded table, he must actually have leaned on it. Thus at the last meal our Lord took with his beloved disciples, John is spoken of as "lying on his bosom," that is, sitting next to him. When therefore it is said that Lazarus was carried into Abraham's bosom, we are perhaps to understand that he was seated, as a mark of honour, next to Abraham himself ; that he was not only received into glory, but into the very highest degree of glory ; removed to the greatest possible distance from all his former miseries, and lifted to a height of blessedness which more than compensated all his woes ; enjoying in the very sight of God, at his own right hand, that "fulness of joy" which has satisfied God himself through all generations.

But turn now to another scene. "The rich man also dies;" and what follows? He is "buried," so buried as to render his funeral worthy of record. Pomp attends him to his grave, and even there perhaps does not forsake him: some stately monument speaks his praises. But while this is going on, while the solemn pageant is darkening the streets, and the flattering inscription is chisseling on the tomb, where is the man himself? where is that part of him, which is still alive to consciousness and thought? In a world of fearful misery. "In hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments." And then the parable goes on; "He seeth Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame."

This representation, brethren, is very simple, but its simplicity serves to render it the more appalling. It proves that the state of this lost sinner was familiar to our Lord's contemplation, and consequently that it was not a state of wretchedness peculiar to this one man, but the condition of all the lost.

The first circumstance that arrests us in it, is *the acuteness*, the extremity, of his suffering. It is "torment," and torment in the midst of devouring "flames;" anguish of the most excruciating and

terrific kind, and also in the most terrific place ; for it is torment in " hell," in a world created to strike terror in all other worlds, to glorify the justice of God by its miseries, as heaven glorifies his goodness by its joys. The earth in comparison with it is a world of blessedness. Its bitterest woes would be welcomed in it as a mighty relief, a glad suspension of misery. They give us no idea of its horrors. The restlessness of disease, the sinkings and oppressions of weakness, the rackings of bodily pain, the sickenings of deferred hope, the cold certainty of disappointment, the shock of evil tidings, the desolation of bereavements, the burdens of care, the dreariness of an empty mind, the anguish of a guilty one, and, still worse, the uncontrollable workings of a mind that the labour of thought and the wear of feeling have exhausted and half disordered ;—some of these we may have endured, but were we at this moment enduring them all, we should have no more conception of the bitterness of hell, than the man who has looked only at the turbulence of a swollen rivulet has of the ocean's fury. It is a lake that burns with a fire we have never felt ; the tears that are poured forth there, we have never shed. It is as unearthly, as incomprehensible, in its misery, as heaven is in its bliss.

And its suffering is without alleviation. It is *pure*, unmixed suffering. In this respect also it

surpasses all worldly misery. Here the most wretched have some intervals of repose, and the most afflicted some alleviations of their sorrow; but in the eternal world, this mixture comes to an everlasting end. The happy are completely happy, the wretched completely wretched. This man is not only in a state of torment, he has nothing to mitigate his torment. A few days before he might have obtained heaven by one real prayer for heaven; he asks now for a drop of water, he cries and cries aloud for a shadow of comfort, a momentary mitigation of his pain, and he supplicates this for mercy's sake, but it is denied him; no mercy comes. O what must be the misery of that condition, in which one single drop of water, one moment's partial ease, should be the object of such fervent prayer! and what its awfulness, that in the universe of a God of love, such a prayer should be heard and yet not granted!

Observe also that the state of this sufferer is represented to be as *hopeless* as it is wretched. His misery is eternal misery, and he is forced to receive into his soul a consciousness of its eternity. "Between us and you," says Abraham, "there is a great gulph fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." How fearful is the strength of this language! There is "a gulph" between heaven and hell, and this

gulph is "a great gulph," and this great gulph is not an accidental, temporary separation, it is "a great gulph fixed," an immoveable, an eternal, as well as impassable barrier between misery and joy. On earth we have nothing like this. There is indeed a great distance between the enemies and the friends of God, but no gulph, no barrier. You who are "afar off, may be brought nigh;" you may come, and come when you will, from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of Christ; you may pass this very hour from death unto life: but when once eternity is entered on, your state is fixed. No effort, no time, can change it. A wretched spirit can never become a happy spirit; no, nor ever be reconciled to its misery, or be worn out by it, or feel it one atom less. Here the capability of the soul to bear anguish sometimes amazes us; we marvel that nature does not fail underneath its burden, or the heart break; but our present strength is no more to be compared with our future powers of endurance, than the miseries of time with the woes of eternity. We know what follows. We sometimes say there is no hope in heaven, but we may say with much greater truth, there is no hope in hell. Hope has never yet entered that dreary world, never thrown a single ray of light into its darkness, never even begun to rise for one moment in any one heart. It is a kingdom of pure, unmingled despair.

It is obvious that two states so widely different as those we have thus examined, must be traced to some great and essential difference in the persons who are found in them. They are still in the dominions of a God of justice, and no slight dissimilarity of character would lead him to assign to them such opposite portions. And yet, on the first view, the grounds of this diversity in their condition are not apparent.

We must not ascribe it to the difference that existed in their former condition on earth, to the riches of the one or the poverty of the other. It is true, as a part of this parable intimates, that wealth, in consequence of our abuse of it, may aggravate our wretchedness in a future world, and that a poor man, if a man of God, may reap in eternity the blessed fruits of his sufferings in time; but as for want or misery saving the soul, as for pain or disease opening heaven, or widening the path to it, or even cleansing us from one of the transgressions that keep us out of it, it is the strangest mistake, the wildest delusion, that ever misled a sinner's mind. If any of you are making such a use of this scripture; drawing this conclusion from it, that you will be happy hereafter because you are wretched now; I may tell you, brethren, without any risk of saying more than the truth, that you might as well expect your tears to keep death away from you, or your

winding-sheet to restore you to life, or the mean boards of your coffin to become a chariot to carry you to heaven. Lazarus was not saved because he was poor, half famished, and sick. At the gate of the mansion, he needed the blood of Christ to redeem him, as much as the rich man needed it in its stateliest hall ; and there is not a beggar on the earth, who does not need it, need it as urgently and greatly in his hut, as the king on his throne ; nay, not a human being who will not as surely perish without it. If you are poor, and know nothing in your poverty of " the unsearchable riches of Christ ;" if you want, instead of leading you to God, serves only to make you murmur against him ; if you are poor and prayerless, poor and envious, poor and dishonest, and repining, and profane ; wretched as you may deem yourselves, your present days are your best ; your present lot, with all its miseries and hardships, is the happiest you will ever know. Death will be to you no happy release. It will be a passing out of the bearable sufferings of time into the unbearable woes of eternity. This scripture speaks no comfort to such as you. It says to you as well as to the richest of your neighbours, " Repent." " Flee from the wrath to come." " Prepare to meet your God."

Nor must we trace the difference between these two men in eternity to any flagrant crimes or

peculiar wickedness in the rich man's conduct. There is not a word in the history to sanction such a notion. Not a single sin is laid to his charge. True, he was rich ; and so were Abraham, and Solomon, and David, and a thousand more, who are now in heaven. True also, he was well clothed ; so are the lilies of the field, which are clothed by God himself. True again, " he fared sumptuously," but there is nothing wrong in taking the gifts of Providence and enjoying them also, so that we take them with moderation and enjoy them with thankfulness ; and we read here of no abuse or excess.

We are very prone, brethren, to ascribe great crimes to the persons whom our Lord condemns in his parables, and by this means we turn away their force from ourselves, and lose much of the meaning and instruction they were intended to convey. He seldom speaks of such characters. He generally describes what we should call blameless, almost virtuous men ; and then he endeavours to strike an alarm in our minds, by shewing us these men rejected by him, condemned and lost. He has done so here.

The true cause to which the eternal misery of this rich man must be traced, undoubtedly lies in this one thing, forgetfulness of God. We gather this from the general tenor of the parable, the occasion on which it was spoken, and the light

thrown on it by comparing it with another parable of a similar tendency, the parable of the thoughtless, worldly-minded possessor of lands and corn, in the twelfth chapter of this gospel. Lazarus, in his poverty, felt his need of God, implored his aid, and centered all his happiness in him and his mercy. His wealthy brother seldom or never thought of God. He tried to do without him. He sought his rest, his happiness, at a distance from him. He made the world, his stately mansion, his gorgeous apparel, his sumptuous fare, his all. There lay the ruinous evil, not in his good things themselves, but in the hold which he suffered them to take of his thoughts and heart. And beware, brethren, lest your good things first engross and then ruin you. They will assuredly perish, but before they disappear, they may cause you to perish. Innocent, harmless, lawful, in themselves, only make them your portion, only seek your main, your highest happiness in them, and there needs no angel or spirit to tell us what will become of you in an eternal world. This scripture, the whole Bible, says as plainly as though one rose from the dead to declare it in your ears, you are in the direct road to destruction, in the broad way to death; and unless you see your danger, and flee to your God for deliverance and to the cross for safety, this rich man's acute, unmixed, endless misery will eventually be

your own. Talk not of your harmlessness. Ask not what crimes you have committed, what vengeance you have deserved. Rivet your thoughts for this day to this scripture. Discover, if you can, this wretched worldling's crimes. The same God that judged him, will judge you, judge you by the same law, measure you by the same standard; make no more allowances for your situation and circumstances, than he made for his; assign you, if you die as you have lived, to the same torment and despair.

We have now gone through the parable as far as we proposed. You must have felt all along, brethren, that the realities it has brought before you, are of the very utmost moment. The man among us, if such a one there be, who can treat them with indifference, is one of the most mournful wonders in the universe. Whatever estimate he may form of himself, no pitying angel can look on him without seeing this declaration of Jehovah written on his brow, "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead." All others among you will be ready to say at the close of this subject, *How poor, how utterly insignificant in value, are those things which man's foolish heart often prizes the most!*

We know but too well what these are. They

are the things which this rich man possessed ; the things which constitute the pride, if not the happiness, of many of ourselves, and are the desire, the admiration, and perhaps the envy, of many more. But what can they do for us ? They may supply a few of our wants, and gratify many of our wishes ; but look at our situation and prospects. Can they minister to our greatest, most urgent necessities ? We have a mortal body, an immortal, never dying soul ; we are every one of us going to the judgment-seat of Christ. Can they save us from the grave ? Can they blot out the sins of a life of folly ? Can they avert the wrath of a forgotten God ? No ; they can do no more than amuse and degrade the soul for a few fleeting years, and then leave it to go into eternity naked and perishing. What then is the real value of these things ? this wealth, this splendour, this rank, in the pursuit of which the whole world is toiling, in the possession of which some of you are glorying ? Ask the dying man for an answer ; or rather ask him who stands by the bed of the dying, or the cold frame of the lifeless. He can scarcely find words to meet your question. He cannot tell you how unsubstantial, how trifling, how completely unworthy of his affections, all these objects of earthly desire appear to him. A shadow could hardly seem to him less real. And he is the man who sees these things as they are. The

view he takes of them in these moments of soberness, is the correct view ; it is that which, either in this world or another, will ultimately be your own. They may have for a season their use and worth, but they are no more to be compared with the riches of heavenly grace, than the lightest chaff with the wheat, than the body with the soul, than time with eternity.

And who has not been reminded to-day of another obvious and affecting, but oft forgotten truth ? *How different are the consequences of death to different men !* We are now, brethren, seated within the same walls, all wearing the same form, sharing for the greater part in the same joys and sorrows, burdened with the same cares, and polluted with the same sins ; but look forward a few years, and how amazing the difference that has taken place between man and man ! Some of us are in a world of peace, with every sorrow gone, every fear at rest, every hope realized ; so pure, that a holy God looks on us “with exceeding joy ;” so unutterably happy, that even in heaven we wonder at our happiness. But where are others of us ? In a land where we shall see them no more ; as wretched as we are happy ; completely and for ever lost. And is a dissimilarity like this, so great, so lasting, and yet so near, a matter of indifference to us ? Instead of asking where we shall be when a few more years have

run their course, on which side the great gulph in eternity we shall awake, shall we go away and forget till another sabbath that there is a heaven and a hell? Then judge whether any recklessness could be more appalling than yours and mine; whether any creature could be found, who has greater reason than we to bethink himself and tremble.

SERMON XIII.

THE PEACE OF GOD KEEPING THE HEART.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 7.

*The peace of God, which passeth all understanding,
shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ
Jesus.*

WE all feel that we need something to keep our hearts. We are living in a changing world, and its changes are often deeply affecting us; and that not merely in our affairs, and homes, and outward comforts, but within, in our inmost souls. The world itself too is exercising over us an almost unceasing influence. It is crowded with objects congenial to our earth-born nature, so adapted to its desires and wants, that we might as well attempt to live beyond the reach of the summer's heat and the winter's cold, of light and darkness, as to live among them and never feel their power.

And more than this, these hearts of ours are naturally restless hearts. There is a self-disturbing energy within them, a principle of disquietude, which we can neither root out nor subdue.

The result is, that even in a calm, in a state of outward ease and quiet, our thoughts, and feelings, and purposes, are continually shifting; but when the storm comes, when bereavements, and sorrows, and temptations, and conflicts, assail him, what is feeble man then? "A reed shaken with the wind;" a bark at the mercy of the gale, yielding to every gust and disquieted with every wave; "afflicted, tossed with tempest," and but little comforted.

It is plain then that we must have something to steady us. We require to be brought under some influence that, without hardening the heart, will govern the heart; that, while it allows troubles to grieve and sins to weary us, will defy any of the changes of life to sway us, or any of the world's temptations to unsettle us, or any of our own corruptions to lead us captive. And where shall we find this? Plainly not in the world; as well might we look to the hurricane itself for repose. And as plainly not in ourselves; for what have we ever looked for there, save helplessness, misery, and sin, and not looked in vain? The apostle shews us in this text the very thing that we need. He points out to us, first, its nature—it is "peace;"

secondly, its Author—it is “the peace of God;” thirdly, one of its properties—it “passeth all understanding;” fourthly, one of its effects—it “shall keep your hearts and minds;” and then lastly, the source whence we receive it, and the instrumentality by which it works—“through Christ Jesus.”

I. We begin with *the nature* of this defending principle. And how much mercy is there, what comfort too for the troubled soul, in the very term which the Holy Spirit employs to describe this! It is not self-denial, not fear, not painful exertion or watchfulness, that is here said to keep the heart; no, it is peace. It is enjoyment, and repose in that enjoyment. It is a calm spread over the soul, which not only refreshes it after the tumult of the storm, but keeps it quiet, saying to the winds as they would again arise, “Be still,” and compelling the winds to obey its voice.

But what peace, it may be asked, can there be to a being such as man? a child at variance with his Parent, a creature at war with his Creator? In his natural condition, none, brethren. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” “The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest.” This peace is the result of a change in man’s state and character; it is the effect of a reconciliation between him and heaven. Its foun-

dation is laid in that transaction which takes place between God and the soul, when the soul feels itself guilty, and vile, and desolate, and casts itself in all its pollution and wretchedness on the free mercy of its Lord. The hour of its birth is the hour when a man sees his baseness, when he feels his misery, and folly, and madness, and cries aloud with all the energy of an humbled, broken heart, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" In that hour, the Lord has mercy on him. He reveals to him the treasures of grace he has stored up for sinners in Christ Jesus; he enables him to embrace by faith his offers of pardon; he unites him to the Saviour appointed for him; and then where are all his transgressions and sins? They are buried in "the depths of the sea." An act of oblivion has cancelled them. There is peace between the man and his God; and the consequence is, now, for the first time, peace springs up in the man's own heart. It flows from this reconciliation with heaven. It consists mainly in a sense of reconciliation, in a discovery to the soul of its own special interest in the divine forgiveness. The sinner feels himself pardoned, and his fears go where his iniquities are gone before, far away from him; he sees himself ransomed, and adopted, and loved, and he is comforted. He now looks on his God as his friend. As such, he trusts him and hopes in him. He regards the promises of

his word as his own. In temptation, he expects a victory; in perils, a refuge; in weakness, strength; in affliction, comfort; in death, safety; in eternity, heaven; and in heaven, God, the presence of God, the enjoyment of God, the very likeness of God.

But this is not all. His faith and his hope purify, while they cheer him. He feels them perhaps only laying to rest his apprehensions, but they are secretly bringing about within him a great moral change; plucking up those roots of bitterness from which much of his former disquietude proceeded, and implanting those affections and tempers which are the elements of all real blessedness. "Being justified by faith," he has first "peace with God;" then he "joys in God by whom he has received the atonement;" and then he enters into that "great peace" which they have, "who love God's law." Taught to long, and pray, and labour, for conformity to its holy precepts, he finds that "the fruit of righteousness is peace, and the effect thereof quietness and assurance for ever."

And this is the Christian's peace. It has as its basis forgiving mercy; it is connected with a discovery of this mercy; it proceeds from a conviction of a real and peculiar interest in it; it is established, and enlarged, and sweetened, by that purifying influence on the mind, of which this conviction is at once the spring and the effect.

We are not however to suppose that every pardoned sinner lives in the full enjoyment of this blessing, or that any pardoned sinner uniformly, constantly enjoys it. Ignorance, self-righteousness, unbelief, in some cases, keep it long out of the heart; and when there, a multitude of human infirmities are continually operating one after another to weaken or disturb it. But in spite of every obstacle, it is experienced, it is enjoyed. In some happy moments in some happy hearts, it "flows as a river," making affliction light, duty easy, mercy sweet; turning the house of mourning into a house of praise, and filling the parched wilderness of life with wells of consolation. There is communion with heaven connected with it. It comes down from heaven. It is the overflowing, the running over, of the blessedness of heaven.

II. Consider, secondly, *its Author*.

It is "the peace of God." And it is called his peace, because that work of mercy on which it rests, is his work, entirely and only his. It had its origin in his own free, spontaneous love. The plan of it came out of his unsearchable wisdom; and not a part of it has been carried into effect, which his own right hand has not accomplished. He provided the Peacemaker; nay, he himself came down from the skies with his own offers of reconciliation. It was he who took on him the

likeness of our sinful nature, obeyed in that likeness his own holy law without transgressing one of its precepts, and then endured its curse as though he had broken them all. It is he who still sits in the same form on the throne of the heavens, and still carries on there the same work. When sinners are brought to his feet, they come to him because he has drawn them. If they cry for mercy, he has first "poured out on them the Spirit of grace and of supplication." Not a tear of contrition do they ever shed, which he does not cause to flow; and not one of them all has ever believed and embraced one of his promises, in whose heart he has not first lodged the gift of faith.

And not only this, he himself communicates that peace of mind, which flows from a sense of pardon and acceptance. It springs not from the creatures of earth, nor could all the angels of heaven impart one atom of it. It is not the mere result of self-examination, or reasoning, or effort, within our own minds. It is the gift of God; and it is called his peace, because it is his property and bestowed by his hand. He reveals to the soul in his own way and time, by his own Spirit, the love he bears towards it, the mercy he has prepared for it, perhaps the work he has wrought in it. He shews it in the blood of Christ, its freedom from condemnation; in the obedience of Christ, its "robe of righteousness;" in the purify-

ing Spirit, the gifts and graces of Christ, its "garment of salvation;" and in the promises and life of Christ, its safety. He unfolds, as it were, the book of life; he shews to the wondering sinner his own poor, despised name shining there; and the consequence is—and how can it be otherwise?—he is "filled with all joy and peace in believing;" he "abounds in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost;" "the peace of God rules," presides and reigns, "in his heart."

III. A peace thus divine in its origin must partake in some degree of the lofty nature of its Author, and in that degree it must be incomprehensible to any earthly mind. The apostle accordingly goes on to describe, thirdly, *this property of it*. "It passeth," he says, "all understanding."

We may attach two meanings to this language.

1. *This peace passes altogether the understanding of such as are strangers to it.* They who have never experienced it, know nothing of its character, nor can they. It is above them; in its very nature, it is out of their reach. Not that there is in it any thing visionary or enthusiastic. No; it is real, it is solid, it is rational; so rational, so well founded, that the wonder is any pardoned sinner should be for one moment destitute of it; so rational, that no other peace will bear thought,

and reflection, and examination, like it; there is no other peace that will bear serious reflection at all. But then it is not so much the intellect that is occupied about it, as the heart. It is a matter, not of science, but experience. It must be felt to be understood.

And this is not a peculiarity confined to this or any other spiritual blessing. It is common perhaps to every pleasure we know. The man of intellect, for instance, may talk of the delight he experiences in the workings of his mind, in his acquisition of knowledge, in his discoveries of truth, the soarings of his imagination, the conscious expanding of his soul; but his words convey no distinct idea of these things to his ignorant neighbour; they excite only his wonder. We may tell the deaf man again of the harmonies of music, or we may discourse to the blind man of the beauty of this heaven-built world; we may reason clearly and eloquently about them; but what has our reasoning done? It has done nothing. The blind man knows no more of the rainbow's splendor, or the landscape's richness, or the heaven's glory, than he knew before; the deaf man is as much a stranger to music and its powers. Just so is it with this peace of God. A knowledge of it is not to be gained by speculation. If we want to comprehend it, we must seek it, we must acquire it, we must enjoy it. In the strong language of the

apostle, we must "taste of the heavenly gift;" we must "taste the good word of God and the powers of the world to come." Our religion must be more than a form or a creed; it must be a work in the heart.

2. And even then this peace will still "pass all understanding;" for *they who enjoy it the most, cannot fully comprehend it*. It is a mystery to the man who possesses it. He is sensible of its existence; he finds his heart quieted, and filled, and purified, by it; he sees and delights in its effects, and he can give us a plain, intelligible account of them; but how did it come into his heart? How is it kept there? Why is it gladdening his soul, while the souls of others are fainting within them for the want of it? Why is it at times so unspeakably sweet, so amazingly strong? To what height of blessedness can it rise? These are questions to which he can give no distinct reply. All he can say is, "the peace of God passeth all understanding." And perhaps an inhabitant of heaven could say no more. The peace implanted in a pardoned sinner's heart may pass even an angel's comprehension. It is "the peace of God," it is "the joy of the Lord;" his own peace, his own joy, and none but his own infinite mind can fully understand its nature and extent. We may all however comprehend its effects.

IV. *One of these effects* is brought before us in the text. "It shall keep your hearts and minds."

By the "heart" we are to understand our affections and will; by the "mind," our intellectual faculties, the understanding and judgment. The peace of God, we are told, keeps both these. Its influence extends to every part of the mind, to the whole soul. And thus our church explains this scripture. The well known benediction in which it is introduced, speaks of "the knowledge and love of God;" it prays that this peace may keep our hearts and minds in both, evidently referring "the knowledge" of him, to the mind; and "the love" of him, to the heart.

The word too which we render "keep," is peculiarly significant. It means to defend as in a garrison; so to fortify and preserve that no invading enemies can come nigh to harm. It implies danger, but it promises us safety in the midst of danger. It assures us of security, not in a peaceful heaven, but in a world of conflict and foes.

But how, it may be asked, does the peace of God effect all this? In many ways.

In temptation, it secures the heart by satisfying the heart. It triumphs over the pleasures of sense by communicating higher pleasures. It purifies and elevates the taste. It destroys the love of the world by making us partakers of a blessedness

which we could never wring out of earthly objects, and which we are now sure, promise what they may, these objects can never give. Will a man labour to fill himself with the husks of the earth, who is living on the bread of heaven? Will he sigh for the damps and twilight of a dungeon, who is warmed and gladdened by the mid-day sun?

And it keeps the heart in affliction. It is a pledge of the special love of God to the soul; and as such, it begets confidence towards him, so that the soul can stay itself on his promises, can encourage itself in his faithfulness, and look to his care and power for a happy issue out of all its troubles. It both begets hope and strengthens hope; and he who is going full of hope to heaven, is not easily shaken or depressed. With a crown of life before him, he feels that he can afford to bear the light affliction of the way that leads to it. Besides, it leaves us something to fall back on, when other props, and refuges, and consolations, are withdrawn. Let a worldly man lose his earthly comforts, and he has lost his all; he is desolate, for he has nothing left; but let a man of God lose what he may, his main support, his chief treasure, is yet safe. Put this peace into his heart, and then place him where you will, on the bed of sickness, in the house of mourning, by the grave of his best, and dearest, and only friend; strike him where you may and how you may, he can

bear the blow. He grieves, grieves perhaps more than other men, for his religion has enlarged his powers of suffering, it has extended his view, it has deepened his feelings and refined his heart; but he is not moved; no practical, no abiding impression is made on him. He may weep for an hour, but he will soon take up the language of the destitute Paul, and say, "I have all and abound; I am full. None of these things move me; nay, in all these things, I am more than conqueror through him that loved me."

The peace of God keeps the mind also. It settles the judgment. Just as it raises the affections by imparting higher pleasures than the world can give, so it informs and elevates the understanding by shewing it, in the light of spiritual blessedness, the meagreness, the poverty, the emptiness, of all temporal good. It does not tell us how to acquire wealth, or consequence, or honour, but it does more; it teaches us how to do without them. It strips these things bare; it takes the gilded cloak off them; it enables us, if we have them, to hold them loosely; to esteem them unworthy of any eager pursuit, if we have them not. It shews us things that are more excellent, riches that are more durable, an honour that is more glorious, a happiness that is divine.

And it keeps the mind by keeping folly, all new and strange notions, all sceptical doubts, all

error, out of the mind. The man who has this peace of God within him, "has the witness in himself," a witness and evidence of the truth, which neither enthusiasts nor scoffers can silence. Tell him that his Bible is not true, that his beloved Saviour has no existence, that his religion is a fable and his hope a dream; while you are talking and reasoning, he is feeling the power of all these things, he is experiencing their truth, their reality, their blessedness. His religion has ceased to be a subject of speculation; it is become a matter of sense. You might as well tell him in the broad light of day, that there is no sun in the heavens to shine on him; or that he himself, living, and breathing, and acting, has no existence. A heart happy in its God is a safe heart. "The joy of the Lord will be its strength," its safeguard. It wants no new doctrines, no fresh revelations, no discoveries. It has found what it needs, and it enjoys what it has found, and is content.

V. One part more of the text still remains to be noticed. It points out to us *the source whence we obtain this peace of God, and the instrumentality by which it works.*

In the preceding verse of the chapter, the apostle had been inculcating on the Philippian converts a freedom from all anxious carefulness,

and a constant referring of all their wants, with prayer and thanksgiving, to a gracious God. "Be careful," he says, "for nothing, but in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God." And then, he adds, "the peace of God shall keep your hearts." But lest he should be understood as ascribing the efficacy of this peace to the prayer which precedes or attends it, lest that which is little more than its companion, should be mistaken for its source, he turns away their thoughts in a moment from the duties he has been urging, and fixes them on the Lord Jesus Christ. "The peace of God," he tells them, "shall keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." And an experienced Christian can enter at once into his meaning. He knows that there can be no peace such as he is enjoying, in a heart corroded with worldly anxieties or destitute of a spirit of supplication; he feels that faith and prayer are as necessary to its existence, as inseparable from it, as though it owed to them alone its origin and blessedness; but then he knows also, that these things have no more power in themselves to quiet a perturbed soul, than to calm a tempest. Our peace will ever on this side of the grave be connected with them, it will seem to rise out of them, its strength will generally be proportioned to their exercise; but if we want its source, if we would

discover the secret spring whence its energy is derived, we must look higher; we must not stop short of the Saviour's throne.

The peace of God has God for its Author and its Giver; but it flows to us through the mediation of his dear Son. It is one of the blessed fruits of his obedience, and sufferings, and continued intercession. We should never have known what it is, never in this world of guilt have even heard of it, had he not made reconciliation for our iniquities, and opened a way first for grace and mercy, and then for peace, to flow down from a righteous God among wretched men. It dwells also in him as the great Head of his church, as the royal treasury in which all the precious gifts designed and prepared for sinners, are deposited. It is dispensed by him. Every portion of it we receive comes from his hand, and owes to him its sweetness. And when dispensed, it is through the agency of his Spirit on our souls, that it becomes our protection; that it keeps, and holds, and blesses us.

Contemplate the Christian's peace in its first rise, its origin—it springs out of the free love, and is the creation of the mighty power, of God. Look at it in its way down to this vile earth—it is brought here by a descending Saviour. View it as actually reigning in man's once troubled breast—it has been lodged there by his Redeemer's

hand ; it flows out of that prayer, and confidence, and hope, those holy dispositions and affections, which the same divine power has called into being, which the same blessed hand has implanted and keeps alive. Behold it perfected in heaven—it is “the peace of God” still, but flowing still from the exalted man Christ Jesus, and glorifying for ever his infinite perfections, while it fills his creatures with happiness and praise.

On these accounts it is that peace is so often connected with Christ in the scriptures. He is called “our peace ;” he is said to “have made peace.” Before he entered our world, he was announced as “the Prince of peace.” When he was born, the song of “Peace on earth” filled the skies ; when he died, peace was the legacy he left behind him ; when he rose again, his first salutation to those he loved, was “Peace.”

And now at last, brethren, let us turn to ourselves. I may have spoken of this peace, and you may have heard of it, as though it were a matter in which we have little personal interest ; but is it not grievous that such a blessing as this should have so little power to affect or attract us ? With hearts actually aching for rest, eager in the pursuit of it, fastening themselves on every trifle that seems to offer even the chance of it, is it not sad that when the Bible speaks to us of rest and

peace, we refuse it even a thought? If we listen to it at all, too often we listen as to a tale or a dream; just as though it told us not of a peace to be obtained and enjoyed by ourselves in this miserable world, but of a happiness situated out of our reach, in the sun or the stars.

Treat it however as we may, the concern we have in this thing is close and deep. There is more involved in it than a little temporary relief in our trials. It is mixed up with eternal joys and sorrows. It is "the peace of God;" it is the effect of reconciliation with him through the Son of his love; it is connected with that faith in his promises, which saves the soul alive; it is the result of his sanctifying operations in man's polluted heart. To be a stranger to it, and to have been always and entirely a stranger to it, is therefore nothing less than ruin. It is to be a stranger to that pardon, that holiness, that mercy and grace, on which the safety of every sinner that breathes, altogether depends.

O ask yourselves then, brethren, what you know of this peace of God; why you have so little of it; why perhaps you have none of it at all; why, it may be, you have never even sought or desired to have it. And then ask yourselves what those empty, harassing things are worth, which you prefer before it. And then look forward, and ask again what you will do without this peace when

sickness enfeebles you, when death comes into your families, when that which you love the best, lies far away from you in coldness and darkness. And ask yourselves one question more. Enquire what substitute you can find for this peace of God in your own dying hour. I know that there are substitutes for it; thousands are creating and trusting in them every hour; but no matter what our dependence is, if God is not the author and Christ the sole foundation of it, we shall find it fail us. It fails us now. It keeps neither our hearts nor minds. It leaves the world in full possession of both. It does not bar the love of the world out of the one, nor the wretched principles and spirit of the world out of the other. It offers us no defence against the assaults of temptation; it abandons us to the power of sin. What then can we expect from it in trouble, in death, in judgment? And what is such a peace worth? a peace that can do nothing for us, that will not bear examination, that, brought to the test of God's word, disappears? O value not so delusive a thing. Seek something better. Seek that peace which flows from a confidence in pardoning mercy and redeeming love. You may assuredly obtain it. There is a fountain, a spring, of it in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a fountain standing as open to you, as to any happy spirit in heaven. And why should you seek it? That you may bear the

troubles of life more patiently? that you may weep over your losses less bitterly? that the anguish of a wounded spirit may be felt by you no more? For a higher end. Heaven is connected with this thing. It is a peace which is an earnest of heaven, which preserves the soul for heaven, and makes it meet for it, and ends in its joys. Blessed as it is now, compared with what it will be, it is as nothing, no more than a drop to an ocean, midnight to noon.

SERMON XIV.

THE CITIES OF REFUGE.

NUMBERS xxxv. 9, 10, 11.

The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan, then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you.

THESE Israelites went over Jordan ; they set apart these appointed cities ; but where are they now ? The men who built them, and they who fled to them for safety, soon found in them a grave, and scarcely one stone remains upon another to tell where they stood. And thus, brethren, it ever has been and ever will be with all earthly refuges. God may appoint them, God may provide and bless them, but we shall perish notwithstanding all they can do for us, and they sooner or later will follow us into oblivion.

But though the shadow has disappeared, the substance is still left. The refuge of which these cities in Canaan were types, is yet standing on its everlasting foundations. It is secure as ever; it is still open and near. May God give us grace to make it our hiding place through all generations.

Regarding the institution before us as emblematical of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, let us direct our attention to these two points;—first, the ends for which these cities of refuge were designed; and, secondly, the means by which their protection was obtained.

I. 1. The first object aimed at in them was undoubtedly *to save the condemned*.

Immediately after the flood, we find God setting a peculiar value on human life. He speaks of man as “created in his own image;” and, as though to harm him were an injury done to himself, he condemns to immediate death any one who should destroy him. “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood,” says he, “by man shall his blood be shed.” From that hour to this, every nation, nay, every tribe of men however small, has agreed in the equity and necessity of this decree. The law given by Moses to the Jews recognized it. It did more; it made such provisions for carrying it into effect, that there seemed no possibility of eluding it, or

getting out of its reach. One of these bears directly on the subject we are considering.

The nearest kinsman of any man who was slain, was allowed, if not absolutely required, to pursue his murderer and kill him. No trial was necessary, no formalities or delay. The offender was condemned by the very act he had committed, and his life was at the mercy of the avenger. But accidents, it might be said, will happen. A man may take away the life of his neighbour unawares, without malice or design. It mattered not, the law condemned him: his life was as much forfeited, as though he had been a deliberate murderer. Hence arose the institution of these towns as sanctuaries. They were set apart, three on each side of Jordan, to shield the unfortunate manslayer from destruction; affording no protection to any one who slew another in anger or even in conflict, but standing ever open to receive and shelter whomsoever accident had made guilty of his brother's death. The avenger of blood dared not lift an arm in any one of them; his authority went from him at their gates.

And here, brethren, we have a representation first of ourselves, and then of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the perilous situation of a manslayer under the Jewish law, we may behold our own; not our character, for he was unfortunate only while we

are criminal, but our danger, the state of condemnation and peril into which we are brought. We are sinners, great, heinous sinners; transgressors of the same law which the guilty angels violated and which Adam broke. They felt its curse, and the same curse is now resting on our heads. It condemned us the very instant we first violated one of its commands. We imagine that we are merely in danger of condemnation, in some risque of incurring eventually the fearful sentence of the divine displeasure; but this view of our condition comes far short of its real awfulness. We are "condemned already." We are standing even now in the situation of convicted transgressors. Angels and spirits never look on us, without seeing guilt and death written on our brow. Upheld, and provided for, and comforted, the objects of amazing forbearance and still more amazing goodness, "the wrath of God is yet revealed" against us; his sword is unsheathed, and the fatal stroke may reach us we know not when nor how, in any place at any time that may serve the best to put honour on Jehovah's righteous indignation, and give to our punishment the greatest terror. And what is this punishment? The scriptures call it "death," but the worst part of it is not death. It is something so mournful, that none of the miseries of earth can be compared to it; so exceedingly dreadful, that in the present enfeebled

state of our minds, we can form of it, except in some moments of acute mental anguish, scarcely one faint conception; we shall never understand it fully till it overtakes us. And it is coming nearer to us every hour. As for escaping it or turning it aside, we might as well attempt to outstrip the lightning in its course, to beat back the fury of the hurricane, or to silence the thunder of the clouds. We must first alter the character of the eternal God or overcome his omnipotence. We must teach the holiest Being in the universe to regard sin and holiness, vice and virtue, with equal complacency; we must prevail on the just Governor of ten thousand times ten thousand worlds to confound together for our sakes right and wrong, to treat alike the lawless rebel and the unoffending son.

In this state of hopeless condemnation, the gospel addresses us. It sets before us the Lord Jesus Christ as a refuge from impending vengeance, a refuge provided for us by the God whose law we have broken, appointed specially to meet our case, and able to shelter us from all its dangers. It exhibits him as set apart to redeem us; "from the curse of the law, being first made a curse for us;" as having met the Avenger in his career of judgment, and after bowing his head to his fearful stroke, receiving from him a commission of mercy to his trembling foes. His cross and passion, his

righteousness and intercession, or rather what these have empowered him to accomplish, it calls "a deliverance," "a salvation," "a hope set before us." It bids us look on him as an open and safe asylum in a situation wherein we can do nothing to save ourselves, in a world where no other sanctuary can be found.

And in such circumstances as ours, to take any other view than this of the gospel, or to keep this view of it out of sight; to regard Christianity as a code of morals, or a round of ceremonies, or a system of doctrines, or the best of many good religions; or even to conceive of it as a provision of comforts only, as something sent down from heaven to cheer us while we live, and to support and elevate us when we are about to die;—if there is mistake in this world of folly, or delusion in this world of madness, it is in this mistake, in this delusion, in this trifling with a matter that involves in it life and death, heaven and hell. The gospel is every thing to a sinner, or it belies itself, it is nothing. It is either "a cunningly devised fable," a mockery of human woes, or it is a great remedy in a desperate case, an antidote for a mortal poison, help in a total wreck, bread for the starving, life for the dead.

2. These cities had however a second end in view; they were calculated and undoubtedly intended *to uphold and exalt the divine law.*

It is clear at a glance, that the persons for whose benefit they were appointed, might have been saved without them. They did not merit death. There would consequently, as far as they were concerned, have been no injustice in exempting them at once from it. As in our own country, their case might have been separated from that of the intentional murderer. But God in all his doings, whether of judgment or of grace, aims higher than man aims. His holy law is ever in his thoughts, and even his works of mercy all sanction and exalt it. Nay, he is especially jealous of its honour in his works of mercy, and makes them perhaps the most affecting, if not the plainest exhibitions of its authority and force.

At the very time that these refuges screened the manslayer from the fate he had incurred, they threw around the sin of murder a peculiar terror. Though no blame could be imputed to him, yet the mere semblance of a crime like this, condemns him. His life is placed for a time in as much danger, as though he had been ever so criminal; and in order to save it, he must fly from his home, leave all that is dear to him, and continue, perhaps to his dying hour, an exile in a strange city. If, then, the people must have reasoned, the guiltless shedder of his brother's blood is thus scarcely saved, how great must be the divine indignation against him who wilfully pours it forth! If all this pro-

cess is necessary to snatch an innocent man from death, what must be the depth of that abhorrence in which the Judge of the earth holds the guilty!

And we cannot even look at the gospel of Jesus Christ, without seeing in it the same tendency and design. Behold the living God sparing not his only begotten Son. Hear the Lord of hosts exclaiming in his own eternity, in that world where hitherto no sound of wrath or judgment had ever before been heard, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd; against the man that is my fellow." And then look at this equal of Jehovah, or rather at this great Jehovah himself, putting off his majesty and glory, clothing himself in the garments of man's vile flesh, entering our world in a form which an angel would have disdained to wear, living here year after year amidst contempt, and suffering, and pollution, and at last dying here the most ignominious death this world of death could inflict. And then advance a step farther. Look at him rising out of the grave still unchanged; taking with him the poor nature in which he died, to his own everlasting kingdom; manifesting himself in it there to his wondering hosts, and sitting down on the throne around which all creation worships, and trembles as it worships, the exulting and triumphant Son of man.

Now why all this? Why this strange, this awful, this overwhelming, spectacle of wonder?

Was it because sinners could not be redeemed without it? Because there was something in the nature of things, or something in the divine mind, that made it needful? Men have said so, good and wise men, but the Bible no where bids them say it; it authorizes no such statement. "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" is essentially a God of pure benevolence. His love was infinite before the degradation of his Son was ever heard of. His incarnation, his cross and passion, were not the grounds, they were the effects, of its exercise towards sinful man. "God loved the world," loved it in its guilty and vile condition, and therefore God "gave his only begotten Son" to be its Saviour. "Herein," says the apostle, "is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." As for the creatures who surround his throne, which of them could have called the living God to account, had he pardoned every sinner that breathes without any sacrifice? His angels might have wondered to see beings that had been polluted and accursed, brought into their pure abode of happiness, but what trembling lip would have dared to ask, "Why doest thou this?" No, brethren, the Lord Jesus Christ humbled himself, and suffered, and died, to "magnify his law and make it honourable;" to shew his creatures, in the very utmost stretch of his love, how

“glorious he is in holiness,” how determined to do or give up any thing, rather than suffer one of his commands to fail, rather than suffer the authority of his eternal statutes to be even suspected. Nothing establishes his law, nothing honours it, like his gospel; nothing goes half so far in proving its unchangeableness; the destruction of a universe could not have clothed it with such fearful glory.

And it is utterly impossible for a sinner to know any thing aright of the gospel, without discovering this. It lies on its surface. To pretend to take Christ as a Saviour, and yet to make light of that which nailed him to the cross; to say with some, that he has abolished the law, or, with others, that he has relaxed its power, or limited its extent, or mitigated its demands; to tell us that he has placed those he loves out of its reach;—we might as well forget, with the blind man, that the sun which gives us warmth, gives us with it light; Noah might as well have denied in the ark the existence of a deluge; the trembling Arab might as well contend, while sheltered in his tent from the whirlwind’s fury, that no breath of air disturbs the desert. Mark with what earnestness, with what a shudder of abhorrence, the holy Paul, that great champion of the gospel, disclaims all such notions. “Do we then,” asks he, “make void the law through faith?” “God forbid,” he answers; “yea, we establish the law;”

“we confirm its authority, its extent, its obligations, its equity, its benevolence, every thing but, in the believer’s case, its curse.

II. We come now to the second point we proposed to consider—*the means by which the protection of these refuges was obtained.*

1. The manslayer was, in the first instance, to enter one of them. Till he had done this, they were to him of no manner of service whatsoever. He was just as liable to perish, as though there had not been one sanctuary in the land. Nay, if overtaken in his way to them, actually in sight of them, at their very gate, he perished; the avenger cut him down.

There is no mistaking the spiritual application of this circumstance. It is not the mere hearing of the way of salvation through Christ, not a knowledge and admiration of it, not any sense, however deep, of our urgent need of it; it is not any one of these things, nor all of them together, that can save our souls. The refuge exhibited to us in the gospel, must be entered; the mercy of God in Christ Jesus must be sought; his promises must be embraced; the soul must actually be put under the protection of its appointed Saviour, before the soul is safe. If we stop short of this, no matter at what point, we stop short of deliverance, we lose heaven. And it is a mournful

fact that the great mass of professing Christians are stopping far short of this. We are told of the love of God ; we hear of the salvation wrought out for sinners and proffered to them by the Lord Jesus Christ ; we believe perhaps in the existence of the world's great refuge, and give credit to the reports that are brought to us of its strength and glory ; and here many of us rest. There is no reaching forth of the soul towards its Deliverer, no longing desire in it after his mercy, no effort made to place the guilty thing in his hands. The great work remains undone. The sanctuary is thought of, is approached perhaps, but never entered ; "the hope set before us" is looked at, but not once laid hold of. With all our boasted knowledge of Christ, many of us are as far from any real and spiritual connection with him, as the very heathen who have never heard of his name. Brethren, be assured that it is one thing to be acquainted with the gospel, and another to embrace it ; one thing to hear it sabbath after sabbath with attention, and reverence, and even feeling, and another to be saved by it ; one thing to have the name of Christ in our ears and on our lips, and another to have Christ himself in our hearts, "the hope of glory."

2. But it was not enough for the manslayer to enter the city of refuge. To secure his permanent safety, we are told in this chapter that *he must*

abide in it. The avenger could not touch a hair of his head within its walls, but if he ventured one step out of them, he was once more at his mercy. "If the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge whither he was fled, and the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer, he shall not be guilty of blood, because he should have remained in the city of his refuge." And the period during which this was to last, was for the man's whole life, unless, for some reason with which we are not made acquainted, the high priest should die before him, in which case he might return without danger to his family and home.

And here we have clearly another spiritual lesson taught us. The sinner who would be saved by Christ, must not only actually apply to him for salvation, but must abide as a suppliant at his feet, must continue that application to his dying hour.

This is not one of the first lessons we learn in our Christian life, brethren, nor one which, at any time, we are the most willing to learn. We think that after certain great truths have been received into our understandings, and a certain process has been gone through in our hearts; after we have been once thoroughly convinced of our sinfulness, have heartily mourned over it, and

really gone to the blessed Jesus for the cleansing of his blood ; our work is done, our salvation is sure ; we conceive that we have no more to do with sorrow, or repentance, or supplication for mercy, but are sustaining a character or placed in a situation, which renders all these things needless or even degrading. But what a mistake ! Give what name we may to the commencement of real religion in the heart, whether we call it repentance, or conversion, or faith, it is but a commencement ; it is something which knows no end, till that religion ends. No part of vital godliness is a single act of the mind ; the whole thing is a habit : not a work which is to be done or gone through once in a man's life, but something which he is to be doing or experiencing all his life long. As for that faith in Christ which brings us at first to his feet, and that application to him for mercy which makes his mercy ours, they form the very substance of a sinner's religion. On this side the grave, he has, he can have, no religion without them. The instant they have no place in his mind, he has no place in the kingdom of his Lord. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord," says Saint Paul, "so walk ye in him ;" "let your whole life be one continued act of receiving him, of stretching forth the hand to lay hold of and embrace him." "The life which I now live in the flesh," he says again, "I live by the

faith of the Son of God ;” “ the faith which was at first the spring of my religion, is now its support ; it is as needful for my spiritual existence, as the air I breathe for my natural life.”

A mere entrance into the city of refuge did not repeal the law which drove the manslayer thither ; it did not obliterate his offence ; it did not disarm the avenger : he owed his safety entirely to his sanctuary. Whatever his character or circumstances might become while dwelling in it, to whatever height of virtue or of honour he might rise, he knew that there was no security for him out of it ; he therefore clung to it and valued it, as he valued and clung to life itself. And so the pardoned sinner cleaves to his Saviour. He trusts nothing that has been done for him or wrought within him ; he places no confidence in any convictions or emotions he has experienced ; he relies for salvation on no love or mercy that his wondering soul has received. These may be, they are, encouragements to his faith, but he does not substitute them for faith itself, nor that faith for Christ. He knows that he is as much a sinner, as in the moment when he first laid himself down at his Redeemer’s cross ; he is certain that the law is as holy and as unbending, as when he first trembled beneath its sentence ; he feels that out of Christ he must as surely perish, as there is a righteous God to judge or a hell to receive him.

The consequence is, he makes Christ his "all in all." Day by day he comes to him for mercy, night after night he implores his protection, year after year the same prayer is poured forth at his feet, "Lord, help me; Lord, save." No words can tell how fearful he is of separation from him; how completely ruined and lost he feels when he suspects that he has forsaken him. It is the one great business of his life, the object in comparison with which he counts every other unworthy of a thought, to "win Christ and be found in him." And Christ himself seems to share in his holy anxiety. He urges him, by his Spirit, to "work out his salvation with fear and trembling;" he "persuades him to continue in the grace of God;" he "exhorts him, that with purpose of heart, he would cleave unto the Lord;" he commands him to "abide in him." He appeals to his hopes. "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." He calls into exercise his fears. He warns, he threatens him. "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

And here, brethren, we must stop; but the partial view we have taken of this ancient institution, will remind us of the care which God manifested

in it, and still manifests in his gospel, of two gracious objects.

The first is *the safety of the submissive transgressor*. We have seen that as soon as the manslayer reached the appointed town, his danger was over. But an hour before, he was not sure of his life a moment; he trembled at the sight of his pursuing foe: now he might stand within the gates as free from danger and as fearless, as though no law had condemned him, or his unfortunate hand had never injured even a hair of his brother's head. There was not a guiltless infant in the city more secure than he; nay, not a man in all the land so protected. To harm him would have been more than murder; it would have involved a violation of his sanctuary, an outrage on the strongest feelings and one of the most valued privileges of his nation; it would have been sacrilege, profaneness, an aggravated contempt of the great Lawgiver of Israel. His life was sacred.

And equally secure is the happy sinner who flies, penitent and humbled, to Christ for refuge. The same God who denounced him for his transgressions, now guarantees his safety; the same authority that once condemned, now protects him. And the man feels his security. He rests and exults in his hiding place. The divine justice no longer dismays him. He thinks of it with awe,

but without terror. He adores it. The law too has lost its power to alarm. As its thunders roll around him, he says with a trembling, but with a joyful confidence, "O thou enemy, thy destructions are come to a perpetual end. I know that I am a transgressor; I feel the bitterness of my transgressions, and I mourn over their shame; but the Lord is my refuge and my strength; he is become my salvation. There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. The curse has been endured, the penalty paid, the Lawgiver satisfied, my acquittal sealed. No one can break in to destroy a sinner who is lodged in the bosom of Omnipotence, and my almighty Saviour will never cast me out of his bosom; for when he took me there, he promised me safety. He told me, and that I might have strong consolation, he confirmed the promise with an oath, that I should never perish; that no one should pluck me from him; that he would never leave nor forsake me; that he would suffer the heavens and the earth to perish, rather than break the covenant he has formed with my worthless soul."

Another object secured in the appointment of these refuges, was *the encouragement of the trembling offender*. Every thing was done for him, that could be done consistently with the sacredness of the divine law. The cities, we are told, were so situated, that from the remotest corner of the

land, he might reach one of them in a few hours. Great care was taken to keep the roads to them open and good. Where there happened to be water, bridges were ordered to be erected; and where two or more roads met, that appeared likely to mislead or embarrass the fugitive, way-posts were set up, pointing out to him the course he should go, and bearing the words, "Refuge, refuge," inscribed on them. Nothing was left unthought of or undone, that could facilitate his escape.

And what more, brethren, could be done for us, than that which a merciful God has already done in the gospel of his son? Could he have offered us salvation on easier terms? Could he have said any thing more gracious to such a world as this, than, "He that believeth," "he that calleth only on the name of the Lord," "shall be saved?" Could he, without staining his own honour, have thrown the doors of his kingdom more open, than they stand at this moment to you and me?

And mark further—the fifteenth verse of this chapter tells us that the refuges in Canaan were intended, not for the Israelite only, but for the heathen "stranger and for the sojourner in the land, that every one," whosoever he might be, "that killed any person unawares, might flee thither." And none are excluded from the salvation of Christ, but those who exclude themselves. No

long continuance in crime, no heinousness of guilt, no tardiness in seeking mercy, no supposed or real unfitness to receive it, need stand in our way. It is as free as the air we breathe. The invitations that call us to embrace it are as irrespective of moral worth, as the sun that shines day by day on this vile world, or the rain that falls down alike on the evil and the good.

And not only is this refuge open to all and free for all, all of us are continually hearing of it, are continually urged to flee to it, are continually told of the security, and peace, and blessedness, that await us there.

And even yet God does not stop. There is a Holy Spirit waiting to be our companion and guide. He stands ready to discover to us "the path of life;" to lead us in "the way everlasting;" to make the road to salvation so plain, that while the wise men of the world are disputing and caviling about it, perplexing themselves and bewildering others, talking of it, but never even beholding it, "the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein."

Again we may ask, what could be done more to carry us to heaven? What more could be desired, what more could be thought of? Well may God say to us, that he is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Well may he declare that "as he lives, he has no

pleasure in the death of the wicked." He may appeal to his word—its gracious invitations, its precious promises, its urgent entreaties, its solemn commands, nay, to the most awful of its threatenings. He may appeal to his works. All, all declare the freeness of his mercy, the largeness of his grace, the tenderness of his compassion. All proclaim to a wondering universe, that throughout this guilty world, whosoever will may be saved; that whosoever perishes, perishes through his own fault, starves in the midst of plenty, dies on the very threshold of the open gate of life.

SERMON XV.

THE CHRISTIAN TAUGHT TO PRAY.

ST. LUKE xi. 1.

Lord, teach us to pray.

PERHAPS, brethren, there is as much of the reality of religion in these few words, as in any words the disciples ever uttered before their Master left them. They indicate more than meets the ear—a mind taught of God; convictions and feelings which accorded well with the situation of these men, and which accord as well with our own. O that they were found among us in every breast! God would be worshipped here as he has never been worshipped by us yet. We should be the happiest people, and this the most blessed congregation, under the canopy of heaven.

Let us enquire, first, what the request in the text implies; and, secondly, in what way,

when we offer it, we may expect it to be answered.

I. 1. It implies a conviction, in the first place, of *the importance of prayer*. I mean, a lively, heartfelt, impressive conviction of it.

And this, in the case before us, seems to have had its origin mainly in the habits and example of Christ. He prayed often and much. He prayed in his sorrow, and he prayed in his joy. He prayed alone, and he prayed with his disciples; amidst the throng of men, and in the "solitary place." We read of his rising up "a great while before day to pray," of his praying "in the evening," of his "continuing all night in prayer." And this under circumstances so extraordinary!—without a sin for which he needed pardon, without a single want which his own right hand could not supply. The natural consequence was, his disciples who witnessed much of this unceasing devotion, were struck by it, and impressed. They began to feel that they also must pray; that what was necessary for their Lord, was necessary for them; that what was good for his soul, would be good also for theirs. They accordingly took this feeling to Christ, and under the influence of it, they sought of him instruction. "It came to pass," says the evangelist, "that as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said

unto him," in the name and probably by the desire of all the rest, "Lord, teach us to pray."

And there is not a pardoned sinner on the earth, not a man among ourselves really in the way to heaven, in whose mind a similar conviction has not been wrought. You do not think of prayer, Christian brethren, as men in general think of it; no, nor as you yourselves once thought of it. You always perhaps deemed it good and right; you would no more have denied its necessity to a dependent, needy, and guilty creature, than you would have denied the necessity of water to the parched African, or of fire to the shivering inhabitant of the pole: but that estimate of prayer was taught you by others; at best, it was the dictate of reason and your own good sense; now you feel its importance. It is become a matter not of judgment only or deduction, but of experience. You are acquainted with your need of prayer, just as the African becomes acquainted with his need of water, or the Greenlander his need of fire, or the beggar in our streets his need of alms, or you yourselves your need of food and air. You know now what it can do for you. It has saved you from so many perils, obtained for you so many mercies, rolled off from you so many burdens, comforted you in so many griefs, sweetened to you so many blessings, brought you at times so near God, and God and heaven so near you,

that you have no power to tell what you think of prayer. In your estimation the earth would be a scene of unbroken darkness without it, and you cut off in the earth from your sweetest and brightest joys; nay, from your safety, and your hope, and your life. You would feel yourselves, without prayer, to be abandoned sinners in an abandoned world.

2. This request implies also some knowledge of *the real nature of prayer*.

It is not easy to ascertain the precise extent of its meaning. Some have conceived that it expresses nothing more than a desire for a mere form of supplication; but the pharisees, or those whom John had taught to pray, could have given the disciples this. Besides, these men were Jews, and as such it is hardly reasonable to suppose that they were either ignorant of the forms of devotion in use among their countrymen, or so enlightened as to be dissatisfied with them. The probability is, that they had discovered at length the insufficiency of all forms, or rather of their own formal mode of employing them. They had heard their Master pray. They had witnessed his fervour, the seriousness, the abasement, and perhaps the soaring, of his spirit in his supplications; and their understandings were opened. Prayer appeared to them in a new light. Before it was a ceremony; it was now an inward, spiritual service.

They regarded it for the first time as the work of the heart; and conscious that their own hearts had hitherto been but little engaged in it, their request was, "Lord, teach us to pray." They wished their prayers to be in future of a higher and more spiritual character; and beyond this, they scarcely knew perhaps their own meaning or object.

And your views of prayer, brethren, if you have learned any thing aright of its nature, have undergone precisely this change. There was a time when a sound form of words, and a somewhat serious mind, contented you. More than this you had heard of, but you never knew and never cared what it meant. At last came the hand of God's Holy Spirit on your soul, and then came with it new and startling views of this duty. "I have never prayed at all," you now said. "I have never even understood what prayer means. I thought it was the bending of the knee and the utterance of the lips; words well selected and solemnly pronounced; but now I see my mistake. Prayer is the utterance of the heart; it is a deep feeling within a man of his wants, and poverty, and helplessness; it is the turning of his desolate spirit to its Creator and Saviour; it is a following hard after God; it is drawing near to him, holding intercourse with him, pouring out the heart before him, a striving to fill an empty soul out of his fulness."

Do any of you ask what prayer is? Look at the publican in the temple. "Standing afar off, he would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!"—that was prayer. Look at blind Bartimeus sitting by the high-way side near Jericho. He cried out so that none could silence him, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!"—that too was prayer. Look at Peter. As he was sinking in the waves on the sea of Galilee, "Lord," he exclaimed, "save me!"—and that also was prayer. And if you turn to yourselves, that was not prayer, which you once thought so devout and hoped so much from; those words of almost heavenly fervour taught you by our church, and repeated by you so seriously in the house and at the altar of your Lord. Think of the time when you felt as though you could not pray at all; that time of bereavement and sorrow, when every earthly solace seemed gone, and every prop broken, and every hope crushed; when you were so wretched, that you knew not how to bear your wretchedness, and were forced, as your heart was well nigh breaking, to cast yourselves on God, and say, though you could say no more, "Lord, help me." If ever you have prayed, brethren, you prayed then. That was indeed prayer, and like that, if you are men of prayer now, are your daily supplications. They may not always have

in them equal earnestness, but they are still like that half despairing cry of misery—there is feeling in them; they have meaning and life.

3. An impression too of *the difficulty of prayer* is plainly to be traced in the disciples' words. And this undoubtedly sprung out of their conviction of its importance, and their newly acquired knowledge of its real nature. That which is so important, must, they concluded, be done aright; and that which is so spiritual, they felt that they could not do at all; and thus they were constrained to seek help and instruction. "Lord," they said, "teach us to pray."

It is an affecting thought that in a situation like ours, we should be unable even to ask for the mercies we so urgently need; and this thought becomes still more saddening, when we reflect that our inability to pray arises chiefly out of the mournful state of our own minds. It is true that our situation itself has something to do with it. The God to whom our supplications must be made, is an unseen, spiritual Being. We are creatures of sense, and find it hard even to realize the presence of One whose "voice we have not heard at any time, nor seen his shape,"—much more to conceive of him as interested in our petitions. But this is not going to the root of the matter.

Prayer, when real, is an acknowledgment of our indigence; it is a confession of emptiness and

weakness: and our proud minds cannot stoop to self-abasement like this. It is impossible they should stoop to it; for which of us has by nature the faintest conception that his helplessness is so real and great, as to render such humiliation needful? We are not even aware of our wants. The divine bounty so constantly supplies some of them, that they are never felt; and as for the others, they are the wants of our souls, and for those souls we have neither a care nor a thought.

Besides, prayer is giving glory to God, and we do not love God. It is placing a Being with whom our carnal minds are at enmity, not only above us, but so high above us, that he becomes every thing, and ourselves nothing.

And more—it is a voluntary going into his presence, bringing ourselves into actual contact with the holiest Being in the universe; and sin makes us wish to have nothing to do with him; we should rejoice to get out of his sight, and, were it possible, out of his dominions; to live in some world where neither his law, nor authority, nor power, could reach.

And hence the difficulty of prayer. It would be easy did our hearts feel aright, but their feelings are altogether wrong; they are full of every thing that is opposed to prayer, and their workings must be controlled and changed, our hearts themselves must be re-created by the mighty power of the

Holy Ghost, before any one of us can offer up one real petition to the God who made him. And even then prayer will often be found no easy thing. The darkened mind, and the cold heart, and the self-exalting, earth-bound spirit, will either turn away from it, or give it a wrong direction and aim, or mar it and reduce it again to form and pretence. The true Christian knows this but too well. He feels something of it every day. When the apostle says, "We know not what to pray for as we ought," he can understand him. The words of Elihu to Job are the words that often suit him well, "Teach us what we shall say unto him, for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness. Hence he often prays that he may be able to pray. Half the prayers he offers up are begun with this petition, or some petition like it, "Lord, teach me to pray. My soul cleaveth unto the dust; quicken thou me according to thy word. Chase away this ignorance, this strange insensibility, from my mind. Shew me my wants, my errors, and my sins. Make me feel before thee as a vile, needy, helpless worm." The request before us evidently breathes this spirit.

4. Besides intimating a conviction of the importance, the real nature, and the difficulty, of prayer, it plainly indicates also *a desire for an increased ability to pray.*

We must not suppose that the disciples had lived to this hour, with such a teacher as Christ, in utter ignorance or in habitual disregard of this obvious duty. The very request they here make goes far to prove the reverse. It is itself a prayer, and a blessed prayer. While it implies conscious ignorance and inability, it implies also something of the spirit of supplication already possessed. But these men felt that they had yet much to learn. They were not satisfied with themselves. They wished to experience more of the power and blessedness of prayer; to pray more like their Master, with livelier feeling, deeper humility, greater enjoyment and success.

And is not such, brethren, the desire of your own hearts? If you have been taught to pray at all, you are not satisfied with your performance of this duty. On the contrary, you are heartily and deeply ashamed of it. Your prayers seem to you nothing better than a miserable trifling with things of tremendous import, a daring mockery of heaven. You can hardly call them prayers. When you think of the mercies you have so coldly supplicated in them, you are constrained to say, "I have talked, I have knelt, I have sometimes wept; but O how seldom have I prayed! What should I be, if the blood of Christ did not cleanse me from the sins I have committed on my knees?"

Nor are you yet satisfied with the blessedness you have found in prayer. Much as you experience in it to refresh and delight you, nothing you experience fully meets your desires. You are always, even in your happiest moments, craving for more; nay, in those moments, the thirstings of your soul after God are the strongest. The more you enjoy of his presence, the more you wish to enjoy.

The effect of all this is a most earnest anxiety for a more supplicating, devotional frame of mind. There is nothing on earth you really long for more than to pray more, to have closer and more frequent intercourse with a heavenly world, to feel more at home at your Saviour's feet. Other graces and attainments of your Christian brethren you admire and would fain possess. You would rejoice to speak like one of them in your Master's praise; you often sigh for the strength which enables another to labour so constantly and arduously in your Master's service; but take you aside and ask you in a sober moment which of them all you most desire to resemble, you would think of some humble, deeply tried servant of your Lord, and say, "O let my soul be in his soul's stead! Let me pray as that man prays. Let me have that fervour, that holy delight, in my closet, which he finds in his." Nay, were your Redeemer once more on earth, did you hear him preaching his

wonderful sermons, did you see him performing his marvellous works, your wish would not be, "O that I could preach, O that I could work miracles, like Christ!" No; you would follow him to the mountain or the desert; you would look at him when most resembling yourselves, struggling, and weeping, and pouring out his soul in supplication; and your desire would be, "O let me pray like my Master! Lord, teach me to pray."

II. We pass on now to our second enquiry;—*How may we expect such a petition as this to be answered?*

In the instance before us, it was answered partially at once. We owe to it the well known prayer we call the Lord's prayer—a model of supplication, which claims at once our admiration and gratitude. The ignorant may have sometimes regarded it with a superstitious reverence, and the formalist may have repeated it with an unmeaning frequency; but human folly can no more degrade than human wisdom can equal it. The man of the most spiritual mind has ever discovered in it the most clearly the traces of its divine origin—an elevation of thought, a loftiness of feeling, a delight in God, his will, his favour, and his glory, so comprehensive a view in so few words of his own situation and wants, that the longer

he holds communion with heaven, and the nearer he draws to it, the more highly he values, and the more frequently and naturally he uses, this short prayer. But with all its excellencies, it is in itself powerless. It could not teach these disciples to pray. It shewed them indeed what their prayers ought to be, but it did not communicate to them the power of making their prayers like it. And what has it done for ourselves? We are as well acquainted with it as Peter or John; we have had it all our life long in our memories; it has passed our lips, it may be, a thousand times; but it has left some of us as ignorant of prayer as barbarians or heathen.

When Christ teaches a sinner effectually, he always teaches him by his own Holy Spirit. This Spirit he calls a "Spirit of grace and supplications;" and he applies this language to him, because he is the great Teacher of prayer; because not a single supplication has ever gone up from this guilty world to Jehovah's throne, which his grace has not prompted. He gives us both the will and the power to pray; and all the teaching we can receive from any other source, unless accompanied with his influence on our minds, will do nothing for us. It may put a few barren notions into our understandings, but it can no more bring one real petition from our hearts, than it could from a stone. Our Lord well knows this;

he is ever mindful of it. Accordingly, as soon as he had given his disciples a pattern for their supplications, we find him immediately directing them where to go for the ability to follow it. He sends them to the Holy Spirit for the inward principle of prayer, urging them to importunity in their petitions for his grace, and assuring them at the same time that their importunity shall not be lost.

How then does this Holy Spirit teach us to pray? In many ways. Among others, in these four:—

1. *By discovering to us our spiritual poverty*; by shewing us our wants and helplessness, or by giving us a deeper, a more enlarged, a more impressive sense of them. We need instruction, brethren, in every thing, but in nothing more than in the knowledge of our own necessities. With wants more in number than the hairs of our heads, and so urgent that we shall perish if they are not quickly supplied, we really know little or nothing about them; listening for years to the Bible that tells us we are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked,” and either wondering what the words mean, or so content in our imaginary abundance, that we do not think them worthy a thought. May I not appeal to your consciences? Have you not lived hours and days, nay, have not some of you lived months and

years, a whole life, without one feeling of spiritual want; without the faintest suspicion of your standing, amidst the comforts that have surrounded and the pleasures that have gladdened you, empty and destitute in a cheating world? Till this insensibility is removed, we can never pray. Prayer begins with a discovery of our necessities. It is kept alive, or, if we suffer it to die away, it is revived and strengthened by having these necessities brought before us more closely, more pressingly, more painfully. We often find it so. Who, as he has bent the knee before God, has not sometimes felt as though he had not a single want to be supplied, or a single grief to be removed, or a single transgression to be pardoned? And who, as his dead soul has looked upwards for life and feeling, has not found his mind gradually opening to a consciousness of its sins and burdens, its perils and helplessness? Ere he is aware, his heart has become alive to its emptiness, it is craving for a supply; he is hungering and thirsting after spiritual mercies; striving to take the kingdom of heaven by violence, not on account of the blessedness that is found there, its rivers of pleasure and its fulness of joy, but on account of his own urgent necessities. The Holy Spirit has awakened him to a consciousness of his poverty, a sense of want has made him importunate, a feeling of destitution has taught him to pray.

2. *Affliction* too is often made to answer the same gracious end.

We say, "Lord, teach us to pray;" and Christ says, "Yes." And then down into the grave goes one of our children, or away into heaven flies the most beloved of our friends; or sickness comes and withers our health, or the iron hand of adversity presses us down. You remember how Absalom treated Joab. He wished for an interview with him, and he sent for him, but Joab "would not come to him; and when he sent again the second time, he would not come." What was to be done? "See," said Absalom to his servants, "Joab's field is near, and he hath barley there; go and set it on fire." They did so, and the end was answered. Joab was immediately in the house and by the side of his friend. "Why have you done this?" he said. "Because," said Absalom, "you refused to come to me, and I had no other way of bringing you here." So, brethren, when we "restrain prayer before God," when we seem, in the hurry of the world, to have half forgotten how to pray, when the Lord calls again and again to us, "Seek ye my face," and calls in vain; then comes the fire on our corn; then comes some dispensation of providence, that destroys or threatens to destroy our earthly comforts, the fruit of our labours, or the object of our hopes; and then at last we fly to our God; then we know

once again what prayer means ; a second spiritual youth is given to our souls ; they feel with all the energy of their first feeling, and pray with all the fervour of their first supplications, and become at last so earnest, so pleading, so much like what sinful and needy souls ought to be, that we bless the affliction which has quickened us again to life and consciousness. Prayer is the design of trouble. God has an end in afflicting us worthy his wisdom and his goodness, and this end he accomplishes ; he brings the people whom he loves, to his throne. "I will go and return to my place," he says, "till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face ;" and then he adds, "In their affliction, they will seek me early."

Many a comfort have you loved away, brethren ; and some comforts you have prayed away. Exceeding joy in a gourd has often withered it, and sometimes a prayer lest you should over-value it, has proved its destruction. It is a serious thing to pray, and more especially to pray for a praying heart. It is often like signing the death warrant of the very things we love the best. And what if it is ? Who cannot afford to lose the whole world, if he has for his companion, and friend, and portion, an all-sufficient God ?

3. At other times Christ stirs up the soul to prayer, *by giving it an enlarged view of the divine goodness and promises.*

A despairing man never prays. Prayer is the language of expectation and hope. It follows then, that the extent and energy of our supplications will be in exact proportion to our knowledge, not only of our own necessities, but of the willingness of God to supply them. Now we cannot reason ourselves into any lively perception of this. It is to be discovered satisfactorily only in God's promises; and it is only by a simple belief in these promises, that it becomes an object of our hope and confidence. When therefore the Holy Spirit would excite in any soul the fervour of prayer, he carries home to that soul the promises made by God to a world of sinners in the gospel of his Son. He increases its knowledge of them; he strengthens its faith in them. He enables it to see the reality and glory of the divine love in the face of Jesus Christ. He shews it how complete that reconciliation is, which he has made for its sins; how rich that provision which he has purchased for its necessities; how wide in its grasp, how well ordered in all things, how sure, that covenant which he has formed with his chosen. In order to bring the mind to pour out its desires, it is made to see all the objects of its desires within reach of it, attainable, treasured up by infinite grace in Christ, and treasured up in him for the sinful and vile, treasured up for itself—peace and pardon, strength and consolation,

grace, and glory, and heaven, all at the free disposal of the Beloved, and he asking for them no money or price, but standing in our desolate world proclaiming his riches, and crying aloud to its perishing inhabitants, "Ask and ye shall have; seek and ye shall find. Every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth."

4. Sometimes the Holy Spirit carries us yet farther. He teaches us to pray *by giving us clearer views of Christ as a Mediator and Intercessor.*

"Teach me to pray," says the soul, and then Christ is manifested to the soul, ascended in his human nature to the heavens, and sitting there, in that nature, on a throne of grace, for the very purpose of hearing and answering its petitions. It sees in the exalted man Christ Jesus a Mediator, a medium of access and intercourse, between itself and its God.

We cannot pray to God, brethren, simply as God; to God as a Spirit. The instant we thus strive to conceive of him, we are baffled. Our weak minds discover that there is nothing in him, which they can comprehend; nothing on which they can fasten: we are bewildered and distressed. But the Holy Spirit comes and withdraws the veil. He shews me the Lord Jesus Christ in the heavens in a human form, and with a human nature and a human heart; as much the Son of man as when he trod the dust, and as really possessed of

all mortal feelings, sin only excepted, as myself. And then he tells me that this is the Being to whom my prayers are to rise. He tells me that shrouded in him, dwells all the fulness of the Godhead; that this Son of man is the Lord of the universe, none other than the everlasting God, the Author and Giver of all the blessings that are found in all his worlds. Influenced by his grace, I believe this amazing fact; and the consequence is, I have now a Being before me, on whom my thoughts can settle, God brought down, in some measure, within the range of my capacities, to be conceived of by me, and approached by me, and leant on, and trusted, and rejoiced in. I behold in my once crucified Redeemer a glorious Mediator. Through him, I have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Seeing that I have such an High Priest in the heavens, one so intelligible, and merciful, and gracious; one who has shared my griefs and carried my sorrows; one who, in his own unparalleled misery, never forgot my wants, and who now, in his wonderful joy, is still touched with a feeling of my infirmities; what shall keep me from his throne of grace? Only let the recollection of my ascended Saviour be brought clearly and powerfully to my mind, and my heart might as well cease to beat, as cease to pray. I now come boldly unto the throne of grace. I know that whatsoever I ask the Father in his

name, I shall receive it. I feel that neither my meanness, nor my unworthiness, nor my abhorred iniquities, shall prevent the great God of the heavens from bowing down to me, nor his riches of mercy from flowing into my soul. I cry, Abba, Father; I feel at a Father's feet; and am at rest.

You are aware, brethren, that I might still go on. I might say, Christ teaches us to pray by much that is passing around us, by what we call accidents—events that make perhaps a whole parish or nation start; crushing, and crushing in an hour, the hopes, and prospects, and happiness, that seemed almost out of the reach of decay or change. And he teaches us by deliverances, by bringing us to the edge of some precipice, and then, as our foot goes over it, snatching us away from it; shewing us in the same moment our danger and our deliverance. But let this suffice.

I would only ask in conclusion, and I would ask it with seriousness, and I would beseech you to answer it to yourselves with seriousness, What think you of prayer? What think you of its nature, and necessity, and importance? But more especially, what are your thoughts as to your own need of instruction in it, its difficulty? Perhaps the idea is new to you. Perhaps till this hour you never heard, you never thought, of there being any difficulty at all in this thing; you have never

experienced any. In this case, you must come to one of these two conclusions ;—either the sermon you have now heard has been grounded on a fallacy, either the disciples meant nothing of what I have represented them as meaning, when they said, “ Lord, teach us to pray ;” or you know nothing about prayer. Here, on the one hand, is a sense of difficulty, conscious inability and ignorance ; on the other hand, no suspicion of any thing of the kind, ease and self-complacency. I will not say where the truth lies, but this I may say, you have not a godly friend on the earth, no, nor a friend in heaven, who would think as you think of prayer for a thousand worlds. If the disciples of our Lord erred, if the minister you have now been listening to has erred, they have erred in such company, their error has been sanctioned by such testimony, that there has never been a man of vital, practical godliness, who has not shared in it.

An easy thing to pray, brethren ? O yes ; to utter words without meaning any thing by them ; to offer a lip service to God ; to use the thrilling, and abasing, and elevating services of our church, without one emotion in the soul, without one feeling of humiliation or one tendency heavenwards—this is easy : but to get the heart into the work ; to bar out of the heart its worldly thoughts and worldly cares ; to feel in Jehovah’s

presence as we pray, and to feel, at the same time, poor and guilty there; to raise an earth-bound soul to God—try for once to do this; go home to your closets and make the attempt. There is no difficulty in foretelling the result;—you will soon be forced to say, as the disciples said long ago, “Lord, teach us to pray.” And then, if you persevere in the effort, we can tell you as easily and certainly what you will say next. You will ere long be smiting in secret on your breast, and you will each of you be forced to cry out, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” And we can tell you too the end, the final issue, of all this. Before many years are passed, your prayers will be turned into such praises as you have never yet uttered or conceived of. The very heavens will be ringing with this happy song from your happy lips, “Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.”

SERMON XVI.

THE WOMAN OF CANAAN.

ST. MATTHEW xv. 28.

Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith ! Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.

THE great God, brethren, is a sovereign God. Save his own holy will, he knows no law and feels no control. And his sovereignty does not lie buried in the hidden depths of his Godhead ; he manifests it, but never so plainly and never so gloriously, as when, at the same time, he manifests his grace.

We have in the history before us, a striking display of both. It shews us a sinner lying in fervent supplication at the Redeemer's feet ; and where ? Not in Jerusalem, in the temple and among the Israel of God ; but in the borders of Tyre and Sidon, of all heathen cities the worst.

And who is this sinner? A sojourner in these idolatrous regions? One of those favoured women who in Jerusalem had sat at the Saviour's feet, and heard his words, and witnessed his miracles? No; she had probably never before seen his face. She was a native of this same vile heathen land. Saint Mark calls her "a Greek," the usual term applied by the Jews to all the Gentiles; and says, she was "a Syrophœnician by nation," that is, an inhabitant of Phœnicia, the country in which Tyre and Sidon stood. And not this only, she was a Canaanite, the descendant of an exiled and accursed race. "Behold," says the evangelist, and he makes use of this expression in order to draw our attention to the circumstance, "Behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me." And who taught her to cry to Jesus for mercy? Who made her thus to differ from all around her, from the unbelieving Jews and the scoffing heathen? A sovereign God, brethren. He teaches us in her, that he "will have mercy on whom he will have mercy;" and he teaches us more, that none, however sunk in ignorance, or misery, or guilt, however far from him, shall ever draw near his dear Son in vain; that "there is no respect of persons with God;" that "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved." He confirms the declaration of the Saviour's lips, "Many

shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."

But we must not regard this miracle solely as an exhibition of divine sovereignty and grace. The Lord Jesus condescends to appear in it at first in a subordinate light. He places between him and us a wretched and helpless suppliant for his compassion, and shews us in her what we ought to be, and what in some measure we must be, before he will pour out on us the riches of his mercy. This woman is evidently set before us as an example. Let us then see, first, what we can find in her to commend; secondly, what our Lord himself actually commended in her; and then, lastly, the gracious treatment she received from him.

I. 1. *Parental love* perhaps is the first feature that strikes us in her character; and that a peculiarly strong and wise love.

The language she uses proves its strength. She says, "Have mercy on me, O Lord;" and again, "Lord, help me." But for herself she wanted no mercy, no help. She makes the case of an afflicted child her own, and in the excitement of her feelings, she forgets that it is not her own. She forgets also to mention the particular mercy she wanted for her. She speaks as though every one

must be acquainted with it; as though no one could possibly be ignorant of her distress or the desire of her soul under it. No language indeed could evince stronger affection, than her simple exclamations, "Have mercy on me, O Lord." "Lord, help me."

And her affection was wise. Its wisdom appeared in the conduct to which it prompted her;—she brought the affliction of her child to the Lord. Not content, like poor Hagar in the desert, with feeling and weeping, she fled to one who was able to save, and cried for his aid.

And that love, brethren, which does not lead to prayer, is a poor love. It may appear strong and it may be strong, so strong that it may almost tear our hearts to pieces, wear us out with feeling, but, after all, the love of a prayerless father, a prayerless mother, a prayerless friend, is but little worth. God often curses such love, visibly curses it; he allows it to become the ruin of its object. We must pray for our children, if we would be blessings to them. We must take the wants of our friends to a throne of grace, if we would really help them. We must shew our affection on our knees. That is the best love, the only safe love, which is often hallowed by prayer.

2. And it was not in a cold, heartless manner, that this woman prayed for her daughter. Observe, in the next place, *her earnestness*; the im-

portunity, the perseverance, with which she pressed her suit.

Her first prayer, we are told, was a cry, an imploring cry for mercy. But this, it appears, though heard, gained no attention. Jesus "answered her not a word." Neglect however did not silence her: she still kept praying and crying on, till at last the wearied disciples could bear her importunity no longer. Touched perhaps with compassion, they came and besought their Master, saying, "Send her away, for she crieth after us." Still not a word for her, but a reply to them, that seemed to preclude all hope, to place her beyond the reach of the Saviour's arm. He answered and said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." "My commission is to my wretched people, the Jews; not to Gentiles and heathen." And now look at her. A bystander would have considered this answer a complete rejection of her suit, more discouraging, if possible, than even the preceding silence; but she sees hope in it. She feels that she has advanced one step towards her object, for she has gained at last the ear of Christ; and she feels too that she must keep it. Down at once then in the dust falls the agitated mother, and saying nothing about his commission, appeals to his compassion and power. Saint Matthew says that she "worshipped him," but Saint Mark

tells us that she "fell at his feet, saying, Lord, help me."

And now surely she must succeed. The tender-hearted Jesus cannot again repulse a suppliant like this. But mark; he answered and said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." This is a term of reproach in frequent use in the east. The Jews applied it to the heathen as the most opprobrious epithet by which they could be designated. It is still employed by the followers of Mahomet in the same manner. But how strange a word to drop from the lips of Christ! How strange that one so gentle should add insult to contempt, and call a poor, distressed mother, while praying at his feet, a dog! But the ways of Christ are often strange. How low will he sometimes abase those whom he has resolved to exalt and bless! And how patiently, how quietly, will his afflicted people sometimes bear this humbling! This woman, we might have expected, would now either have sunk into the silence of despair, or risen from the earth in anger, and turned her supplications into complaints. But grace triumphs when grace prays; triumphs over feeling, and temper, and every discouragement. With astonishing quickness, with that admirable ingenuity which nothing but deep emotion can display, she turns the reproach thrown at her

into a plea, and grounds on it a renewal of her suit. "Truth, Lord," she says, "yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." "The bread, the feast, is indeed for the children, but is there not enough and to spare? There may be fragments remaining for the very dogs."

This was indeed prayer, but all prayer, all real prayer, is like it. There is feeling and earnestness in it; a feeling which the Holy Spirit excites and sustains in the heart, and an earnestness which he suffers nothing to overcome. A man who prays at all, must at times pray thus; he will pray thus. Look at a starving beggar. When he asks you for bread, his soul is in his words. A refusal does not silence him, a repulse does not send him away: he will ask again and again, till his entreaties have touched you. And why? The man feels himself starving; he knows that he must have bread or sink. And O what are we, brethren, in the midst of all our comforts? Are we not perishing? Have we not starving and dying souls? Such is our situation, so destitute, so perilous, so awful, that any real prayer for relief must be an earnest prayer. It will be this woman's petition, "Lord, help me." It will be the sinking Peter's cry, "Lord, save me." It will be the appeal of the storm tossed disciples, "Lord, save us; we perish." It will be the fervent sup-

plication of our own scriptural church, "O God, the Father of heaven, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners."

3. But let us go on to another grace manifested by this woman;—*deep humility*.

We now think nothing of prostrating ourselves in prayer before the Lord Jesus Christ. We know him to be "God over all, blessed for ever," and we feel at once that the dust is our station before him. But when he appeared on earth, the case was different. He stood here as a man of ordinary appearance and more than ordinary meanness, a despised and persecuted Nazarene. The great mass of those who saw him, would have spurned the thought of bowing the knee to him; many of them would have been ashamed even to be seen in his presence. There was no possibility of treating him with respect, without, at the same time, sharing in his disgrace. But this woman of Canaan deeply and publicly abases herself before him. Heedless of derision and scorn, she comes and falls at his feet; she lies there supplicating his help as one undeserving his help, and imploring his mercy as having no other claim on his mercy, than her wretchedness and need.

And mark this especially—she took the character which the Lord assigned to her; she prayed on the ground where he had placed her. It was the lowest ground on which she could be placed.

He called her "a dog," a name expressive in her country of every thing vile and base, of the strongest abhorrence and contempt. Yet she re-echoes the name; she applies it readily to herself as nothing worse than her due, and as a dog she renews her petition.

And herein lies real humility. It does not dispute with God. It teaches us to regard ourselves as God regards us, to deem ourselves what he tells us we are. Does he describe us in his word as unworthy, guilty, perishing? Does he say that we are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked?" We are not angry with his words; we do not set ourselves to explain them away or weaken their force. We take our stand on the humiliating ground marked out for us, and plead for the mercy which he has provided in Christ Jesus for the sinners he finds there—light for the blind, raiment for the naked, gold for the poor, pardon for the guilty, salvation for the lost. Never need the best of us, or the worst of us, fear getting too low when we pray. We can never sink beyond the reach of the Saviour's ear or the Saviour's arm. It is sweet to pray in "the spirit of adoption," sweet to ask for blessings at our Father's hands like those who know that they are the Father's children, but this is not needful: the dogs eat of the crumbs; a sinner's prayer can pierce the heavens; the vilest trans-

gressor that ever breathed, never asked a single mercy of the Lord and asked in vain.

II. So much for our commendation of this woman. Let us turn now to *our Lord's commendation of her*.

And it is remarkable that he passes over in silence all that we have admired. He says not one word of her parental love, or earnestness in supplication, or deep humility. He does not let us discover that he even sees them. He commends, he notices, only her faith. "O woman," he says, "great is thy faith!"

And this was in perfect accordance with his conduct on other occasions. You remember the woman who came to him in Simon the pharisee's house; that happy mourner, who "washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head." As we look on her weeping at his feet, we are delighted with her feeling, and contrition, and love; but here again, though in his reproof to Simon he vindicates her affection, Christ singles out another and a far less conspicuous grace for his praise. He ascribes her peace and her safety to her faith. "Thy faith," he says, "hath saved thee; go in peace."

Now there must be some reason for the peculiar honour thus uniformly put on this grace; and it is probably this—faith is the root or principle

from which all other graces spring. It is not only mixed up with them, but it is their origin, their source. They grow out of it; they are kept alive, they are perfected, by it.

It is easy to discover that it lay at the root of all this mother's virtues. If her parental love did not owe to faith its existence, it was faith, that gave it the direction it took; it was faith, that brought her with it to the Saviour's feet; it was faith, that made it a wise and holy love. Little indeed would it have benefited her afflicted child, if faith had not guided it.

And her earnestness, her perseverance, in prayer, were the fruits of the same grace. Who ever asks us for that which he does not at least think we possess? and who does not soon cease from asking, unless he has an impression on his mind, that we are able to give, and, in the end, will give him the help he implores?

As for her deep humility, her willingness to stand on the ground where our Lord's contemptuous appellation placed her, nothing but a peculiarly strong faith could have wrought that. She believed him to be a great Saviour; she was not therefore afraid to pray as a great sinner. She believed his power and compassion to be unlimited, boundless; it mattered nothing then, in her estimation, how unworthy, how abject, she was, nor how desperate her child's case. There

was help for her in him, and help, she felt sure, that she might attain. Weak faith makes us afraid to lie low; we do not see how comfort or help can come to us there. Accordingly we often want to see or feel ourselves to be the children, the people of God, before we ask for his mercies. But when faith grows strong, this solicitude, in a great measure, dies away. We can pray then as sinners, pray just as our church teaches us all to pray, as "miserable sinners;" and in this character, we can ask and expect from Christ unutterable blessings. We do not even endeavour to find any encouragement or ground of hope in ourselves. We have all the encouragement we need in the free mercy of an infinitely gracious God; and we wish for no higher warrant for our hope, than the promises he has made to the most sinful and lost.

But, observe, our Lord not only singles out this woman's faith for his commendation, he commends it as faith of an extraordinary strength. "Great," he says, "is thy faith;" and he says this evidently with a feeling of admiration. There are but two instances on record, in which he uses language of this kind, and both these are the cases of Gentiles; one that of the Roman centurion; the other the case of this woman of Canaan. This circumstance shews us that his Holy Spirit can cause this blessed grace to grow in any soil; can

make it abundant in any heart ; can enable it to overcome the world however it may assail us, and triumph over the most formidable and most opposite discouragements. It shews us too that Christ marks the difficulties with which we are surrounded. There was doubtless in the faith of each of these persons, a peculiar extent of grasp, and a peculiar vigour of exercise. One deemed him able to heal his servant by a mere word from his lips ; the other recognized in him David's long expected Son, the promised Messiah : she prostrates herself before him as a Being who well knew her situation and wishes, and appeals to the greatness of his mercy and power, as though she were pleading with the living God. But it was neither its extent nor its strength, simply considered, which obtained for this faith our Lord's commendation. Its chief excellence was derived from the situation, the circumstances, under which it was manifested. It was faith out of Israel. It was faith flourishing among unbelief and idolatry. It was a flower in a desert ; it was fruit brought forth amidst thorns.

III. Let us look at *the gracious treatment which it obtained for her.*

1. And here we are struck, first, by the fact, that *Christ delayed his answer to her petition.*

And could there be grace in this ? It would

seem so, brethren, for thus the Lord deals the most frequently with those he loves the best. It is his manner with his dearest and holiest servants. He thus treated his prophets of old, even when executing his work, and suffering for their faithfulness in his cause. "O Lord," says Habakkuk, "how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear? even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save?" "When I cry and shout," says the mourning Jeremiah, "he shutteth out my prayer," "closes, as it were, the door of his dwelling-place, lest my supplication should enter in." "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud," he says again, "that our prayer should not pass through." And in how mournful a strain does the church in the Canticles bewail her baffled efforts to find her Lord! She describes him as inviting her prayers, as standing at the door of her habitation and calling her to communion with him. She rises up joyfully to welcome him, and where is he? "I opened to my Beloved," she says, "but my Beloved had withdrawn himself and was gone. I sought him, but I could not find him. I called him, but he gave me no answer." And sometimes this delay goes on till the case appears hopeless, and the soul is well nigh ready to faint. "I am weary of my crying," says the afflicted David; "my throat is dried; mine eyes fail, while I wait for my God."

Does this language, brethren, describe your own situation, and your own feelings of disappointment, and pain, and wonder, under it ? It would be useless to say to you, your condition is a happy one ; but bring faith into exercise, and it will tell you that though it is a suffering, it is not, and cannot be, a lost one. God is dealing no worse with you, than he dealt long ago with men “of whom the world was not worthy ;” men who were ever in his eye, and always on his heart ; whom, your own consciences testify, he could no more have cast off, or forgotten, or neglected, than he can now cast off his glory or forget his joy. Neither has he abandoned you ; no, nor laid aside his mercy in his dealings with you. It has assumed a form which, for the moment, you cannot comprehend, and this is all. It is no new form. Thousands have beheld it, and, like you, wondered at it, who are now in heaven. You are remembered still “with the favour that the Lord has ever borne unto his people ;” he is still “merciful unto you, as he uses to be unto those that love his name.” You are eating of his children’s bread ; he “dealeth with you as with sons.” Look again to this repulsed petitioner.

2. While the Lord delayed the mercy she supplicated, *he gave her strength to persevere in prayer for it, and made that prayer more humble and earnest.*

We have been commending a fellow-sinner, but we ought rather to have been admiring the grace of God in her. It was that which made her what she was. Left to herself, we should have seen in her nothing to wonder at; she would have turned away from Christ at his first repulse of her, joined with any scoffers who would have derided him, and when the cry of "Crucify him" arose, her voice might have been heard in the shout. But he never struggles with a praying sinner, without giving that sinner power to struggle with him. Before he wrestles in his omnipotence with a feeble worm that prays, he puts his own strength within that worm to arm it for the conflict. He strove within this woman by his Spirit, while in his demeanour he strove against her; upholding her faith, keeping alive her hope, suppressing every rising of wounded feeling, and enabling her to triumph over every discouraging word and appearance. The praying psalmist he treated in the same way. "In the day when I cried," he says, "thou answeredst me;" and what was the answer? "Thou strengthenedst me with strength in my soul."

And put up, brethren, what prayer you will, no mercy you can receive from heaven in answer to it, can be more gracious, than strength to pray on; none can be thought of, that carries more love in it, or bears more plainly the impress of heaven.

God only can give you this. Nature, in a time of distress, may pray or rather seem to pray, but nature can never brook a denial or bear delay. She must either obtain at once the blessing she supplicates, or, "It is vain to serve God," she says, and turns to human helpers, or abandons herself to misery. It is grace only, that hopes against hope. It is grace, that lies down waiting at the footstool of a delaying God. It is grace that says amidst discouragements, and mystery, and sufferings, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." "I will wait for the Lord that hideth his face, and I will look for him."

And whenever Christ sustains a spirit of prayer in any heart under a delay of his mercy, he generally does more than sustain it; he makes that very delay the means of increasing it. We want a mercy; it comes at once, and then prayer languishes or ceases altogether. The mercy at another time is withheld, but a greater mercy is given; the soul is kept thirsting for God; is excited to thirst for him more intensely, to plead with him more earnestly, to wait on him, to "follow hard after God." It is a test of true prayer to be quickened, rather than dispirited, by heaven's silence. Prayer seems to live on discouragements, to draw out of them fresh spirit and strength. Blind Bartimeus, we are told, "cried the more a great deal" for mercy; and when? When Christ seemed to be pass-

ing him unheeded, and "the multitude were charging him that he should hold his peace." The petitioner before us prayed at first like one taught to pray. She asked, as an undeserving sinner, for help and mercy, and she asked for them with an imploring heart. But when Christ had first neglected and afterwards repulsed her, how did she pray then? She takes the dust for her station, and affords us there such an example of humility, and faith, and fervour in supplication, as we can scarcely find elsewhere even in the book of God.

3. And mark further; *Christ put on her signal honour.*

Indeed whenever we honour God, God always honours us. Whenever we willingly advance his glory, though we advance it quite unconsciously, he always takes care of ours. Our glory, in fact, gets so connected and intermixed with his, that the one cannot be discovered without bringing into view the other. And thus he displays his condescension while he manifests his greatness. By causing his glory to shine in us and through us, he allows us to share in that which is his alone.

Now prayer crowns God with his highest honour. It "ascribes greatness" unto him, and that greatness which he deems his noblest praise; it represents him as a God of mercy and never failing truth. We need not wonder then that God honours prayer; and that he honours it the

most, when he puts it to the most fiery trial, and keeps it in exercise amidst the severest checks. He is not satisfied, in such cases, with giving it the petition it asks for; he bestows it in some manner that stamps the happy suppliant with his approbation, and carries home to his heart an assurance of his love.

Contrast the case of this Canaanite with that of another praying heathen, the centurion of Capernaum. Before he is able to utter one word of supplication, he obtains a promise of help, and that help all the help he wishes for. "Lord," he says, "my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented." "I will come and heal him," says Christ. What a readiness to hear and answer prayer is manifested in this answer! "It shall come to pass," Christ seems to say to us in it, "that before they call, I will answer; and whiles they are yet speaking, I will hear." And what an honour too conferred on this petitioner! He obtains his request almost without making it known, and obtains along with it a commendation of his faith. But put the question to yourselves—Had you not rather have been this baffled, long tried woman of Canaan, than that speedily answered Roman? Do not her graces shine more brightly? Has she not obtained at her Redeemer's feet more abundant honour? And ask again, Does she not owe this honour to that Redeemer's tar-

diness to grant her suit? And does she not at this moment deem that once strange tardiness a mark of his gracious favour towards her, a flowing out of his love? And do not you yourselves view it in the same light? And such ere long, brethren, will you regard that delay of mercy which now weighs down and perplexes your own soul. That which keeps prayer alive and strengthens it in hearts like yours; that which holds you who are prone to wander so far from God, so very near to him; that which impels you to honour God and leads God to honour you;—that must be a blessing. It may for a time half break your hearts, but eventually it will fill those hearts with praise and joy. Turn once more to this history.

4. Our Lord, at last, *gave to this woman all she desired*. “O woman,” he says, “great is thy faith! Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” And he evidently says this in the accents of admiration, with feelings of delight and love. Till now, he had been refraining himself before her; he had been bridling within his own breast emotions which it would have made her heart burn with joy to know, but which he could not discover without robbing her of much of the honour he meant to put on her. His end is at length answered; and now, like Joseph among his brethren, he can refrain himself no longer; he gives a joyful utterance to the feelings which had all along been struggling

in his soul, and manifests himself to her in all his tenderness and grace.

We learn then here, that *there is often more love towards us in the heart of Christ than we can see in his dealings with us.* We judge of the love of a fellow-creature for us by his conduct towards us; and if his love be real and strong, his conduct generally appears to us consistent with it. He aims in it at the same end as we are aiming at, and, looking on things as we look on them, the means he employs to attain this end, in other words, to promote our welfare, are, in most cases, such as we understand and approve. But we must not judge thus of the love of Christ. He aims at a higher happiness for us than we think of for ourselves, and brings that happiness home to us in a way which may long appear calculated to bring to us nothing but misery. The consequence is, that we are not always able to reconcile the dispensations of his providence with the reality of his love. He often seems to be acting as our enemy rather than as our friend. All his ways are dark and mysterious, and through the clouds that surround his throne, we can see no ray of his goodness, no trace of his favour. Sight fails us in such seasons, and we want a higher principle to keep us waiting on the Lord. Faith is this principle. It can tell us in these seasons, in any season, that the love of Christ is still overflowing,

though it is all hidden from our eyes ; that it is sometimes in the strongest and tenderest exercise, when we think it perished for ever. There is nothing in the world half so precious as a simple trust in him. It can bring light into the soul in the darkest hour, and throw the brightness of hope into the thickest gloom.

We learn also here that *the prayer of faith is always crowned, in the end, with abundant success.* Observe that our Lord not only gives this woman what she asks, but so gives it her as to let her see that she may have any thing she asks. He does not say to her, "Thy daughter is made whole;" but, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." He makes her own wishes the measure of his bounty. And how must her heart have bounded at such a saying as this ! Who that has a mother's or a father's feeling, can help picturing to himself the ardour of gratitude, the tears of joy, with which this distressed parent must have caught these gracious words ! Fervent prayer, when granted, turns into fervent praise. That then could be no common praise, which a suppliant like this offered to such a Benefactor for such a mercy ; and that no common joy, with which such a mother returned to her home, and clasped to her heart her restored child. It was a joy that left her nothing to wish for, but more of the mercy, more of the favour and presence, of her gracious Lord.

And what desire of your heart, brethren, will be left unsatisfied, if God has made that heart a heart of prayer? None but Christ can satisfy you. It is not in the power of the whole creation to say to one immortal spirit however sunk, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." But Christ can say this, and does say it sooner or later to every seeking, earnest, humbled soul. He never has failed, he never will fail, such a soul. It is a thing unheard of in his universe. All hell would wonder at it, and heaven for the first time tremble. He mocks none. Desires that he has enkindled, he always satisfies. If he has taught you to desire his help and mercy, help for your lost souls and mercy for eternity; to desire them as absolutely needful for you, and to seek them as the free, unmerited gifts of his compassion; that very desire becomes a warrant for your hope. Be assured that he has pledged himself, in his everlasting covenant, to bestow them on you; and to bestow them in no scanty measure, but, stretch your thoughts to the very utmost, grasp all the riches of grace and glory in your boundless wishes, to give you "exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think." No matter how low the ground on which you pray, nor how high your petitions soar, the blessing is promised, prepared, ready.

Are you thinking of a dreadful hell, and praying for deliverance from its terrors? "There is

no condemnation," he says to you, "to them which are in Christ Jesus." "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Do your thoughts turn inward? Is your language this, O that my polluted heart were cleansed! O that these vile corruptions were subdued, this tumult within me calmed, these fears and doubts dissipated, these burdens lightened, this darkness, these frightful clouds, swept away! The answer he sends you is the same, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." "Sin shall not have dominion over you." "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Are you longing for an eternal world? Are you saying as you think of heaven, O that that glorious heaven were mine! O that I might be with him whom my soul adores! O that I might sit at his feet, and see his face, and behold his glory! Still the same answer comes, or soon will come, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." "I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

"What will ye that I should do unto you?" is the question of Christ this very day, this very hour, to all of us; and there is not one of us, who can think of a single real blessing that he may not ask and have. He is the most acceptable petitioner amongst us, who asks the most.

As for you, brethren, who are never found at the feet of Jesus, who never seek his help nor desire his mercy, or if you ever supplicate them, ask for them as though you would not stretch forth an arm to make them yours, wonder not in a dying hour, if you die without them. His readiness to give them, stamps your want of them with a fearful character. You must think of it no more as a misfortune. It is plainly a want that you would not have supplied. It is a state of poverty that is your choice. It is your sin, and will eventually be your destruction. He who now lays open the treasures of his grace, and bids you take of them with a free and unsparing hand, is jealous for the honour of his mercies. He will pardon any thing rather than contempt of them. The dishonour you have done to them will draw down on you his heaviest vengeance. Would you know what this vengeance is? It is only this, but what could it be more or worse?—you shall be without his mercy and help for ever. You shall wake up, in an eternal world, as spiritually destitute as you are content to be in this; and when you cry for his mercy, you shall cry in vain. You refused it here when offered; he, in his turn, will deny it there when implored; and not with the silence of an hour or a day, but with the everlasting silence of worn out, exhausted, mercy.

SERMON XVII.

THE PRAYER OF CHRIST FOR HIS CHURCH.

ST. JOHN xvii. 24.

Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.

THE twentieth verse of this chapter brings home this blessed prayer to ourselves. The Saviour tells us there, that he prays not for his beloved disciples only, his companions in his degradation and miseries, but for all who “should believe on him through their word.” Now, brethren, if any of us believe on him, if we have given credit to his promises and found repose in his mercy, then this prayer refers to us ; we are as much interested in it as Peter who heard it proceed from his lips, or John who lay in his bosom as he breathed it forth. And this is the way to extract sweetness

from all the promises and gracious sayings of Christ, to connect ourselves with them, to believe ourselves to have been in his mind as he uttered them ; not there undistinguished in a mass, mixed up and half lost in a multitude, but as individually and as closely in his mind, as though there were no other being in heaven or in earth occupying his thoughts.

In thus looking at the prayer before us, we may consider, first, the description which Christ gives us in it of his people ; secondly, the blessings he supplicates for them ; and, thirdly, the light which it throws on his own character and our condition.

I. The Lord Jesus *describes his people* in this text, not as they are generally described in scripture, by their character or privileges, but by a transaction in which they had no immediate concern, by a transfer of them which has taken place in heaven between the eternal Father and his everlasting Son. They are those, he says, whom the Father has given him.

But what is the meaning of this language ? Are not the heavens and the earth Christ's ? and have they not been his, with all that lives and moves and has a being in them, since the moment when they started into existence ? They have ; "by him all things were made, and he is their Proprietor

and their Lord." But we must observe that he is not speaking in this passage as "God over all," for as God to whom could he pray? but rather in his human character, as the Son of man, as the incarnate Mediator and Head of his ransomed church. In this character, the Father promised to him a people, and has made them over to him—the very people whom he had himself selected from among his creatures to be the happiest monuments of his goodness and the richest sharers of his glory. The very act of his bestowing them on Christ proves their value in his own sight. He would not, he could not, have offered to one so dear to him, a gift which he despised. An earthly father gives his child his best; and there was nothing in all his wide dominions, which their great Monarch valued more, when he gave us to his Son, than he valued us. Not that he cut his people off by this transfer or isolated them from himself; not that he abandoned the purpose he had formed to redeem, and purify, and exalt them; no, he gave them to the anointed Jesus that this design of love might be accomplished, that all his purposes of grace concerning them might be more effectually and more gloriously fulfilled.

1. Hence we may view them as given to Christ, in the first instance, as *his trust, his charge*.

When the Father first set his love upon them, he foresaw that they would be utterly unworthy

of his love, and altogether incapable of entering into his blessedness ; just as much alienated from him as their fellow-sinners, as earthly minded, as desperately wicked. He therefore describes himself in the prophet Jeremiah as saying to them, “ How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage, of the hosts of nations ? ” “ How shall I take this condemned, this rebellious, this polluted people into my own unsullied heavens ? those heavens, into which nothing must ever enter, that is accursed or that defiles ? those heavens, whose purity they hate and whose joys they cannot know ? ” — It is plain that before his purposes can be accomplished, his people must first be pardoned and justified ; the honour of that holy law they have insulted must be in some way vindicated, and his own character as the great Lawgiver upheld : and they must undergo too a total change within, have all their desires and thoughts and hopes purified, be made in fact new men. And this arduous work God confided to his Son. He committed them into his hands as their all-sufficient Redeemer, to be first ransomed by his blood and clothed in his righteousness, and then to be wrought on by his grace, lifted up in their affections from their native dust, and taught to thirst for heavenly employments and delights.

On this account the Lord Jehovah often speaks

of the incarnate Jesus as his servant ; and Christ testifies of himself as coming into the world with a commission from his Father, and as actually fulfilling here his destined work. "I came down from heaven," he says, "not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day."

2. But a gift, to be acceptable, must bear to be tried by yet another test ;—the receiver must value it as well as the giver. If then Christ has consented to receive us as a gift from his Father's hands, no matter how complete our worthlessness, how despicable our vileness, we are, we must be, precious in his sight. Just as we infer the love of the Father towards us from the gift he made of us, so we infer the love of Christ towards us from his joyful readiness to accept us as his own. We are warranted therefore to advance a step further, and say that the people of Christ are given to him as his *reward*.

But how can he be rewarded, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead? he who is none other than the Lord of the universe? He is an infinite Being ; and how can his greatness be augmented or his happiness enlarged? We cannot fully answer the question. We can only say again that we have the Saviour before us in

his human form, with human feelings and a human heart ; and that heart is as capable of receiving accessions of pleasure as our own, and that nature is as susceptible of honour and reward. And it is in this human character that he receives his people. The Father gives them to him in his assumed office of his servant, and as a recompence for his labours in that office. He makes them over to him as his own, as a people peculiar to himself, appointed to bear his image, to shew forth his praise, to be the everlasting trophies of his conquests. This was his stipulated reward, and with this he is well pleased. No sooner did he hear the promise, "He shall see his seed," than he answered, "Lo, I come. I delight to do thy will, O my God." And what was this will? Nothing less than giving "his back to the smiters," going through the lowest degradation, pollution, and misery to a cross, and from that cross to a grave. And in this, he says, he delighted ; not that his soul took pleasure in pollution or felt allied to misery ; not that shame did not grieve and pain did not rack him ; he delighted in it, that by it he might purchase his church unto himself, that he might have the companions of his tribulation for the companions of his glory, that he might have such worthless beings as you and me, by his side in the heavens, redeemed, and purified, and blessed. And O with what joy and

triumph will he appear, when the number of his elect is accomplished and his reward is full ! when the last soul that is his, shall be gathered into his kingdom ; when the last stone shall be raised in his spiritual temple ; when the last spot and wrinkle from his church shall be wiped away ; when not a grace shall be wanting, or a stain shall be left ; when he shall stand before the throne of Jehovah, and say, like a faithful servant, or rather like a triumphant victor, "It is finished." "Behold I and the children whom thou hast given me." "Those that thou gavest me, I have kept, and none of them is lost."

And now, brethren, with what seriousness should each one of us ask himself, Am I one of this blessed people ? Has my poor soul been ever thus given to the Lord Jesus Christ ? Am I at this present moment his charge, and shall I be a part of his great reward ?

And we need not ascend into heaven, and turn over there the records of eternity, to answer these questions : they may be answered easily and safely within these walls. If I would know whether the everlasting Father has given me to his Son, I must ask whether I have ever given myself to that Son. Have I ever felt my need of his care and keeping ? Have I ever committed my soul into his hands as guilty, and polluted, and helpless, to be washed from its sins in his blood, purified by his

Spirit, and made meet for his presence by his grace? Have I done this repeatedly? Am I doing it still? with simplicity of soul, with fervent prayer, with deep humiliation, with lively thankfulness, with faith unfeigned? And how do I feel and act towards Christ? Do I in the main regard myself as his, only his, entirely his? Have I given my heart to him? Amidst the conflicts of its workings, the turbulence of its feelings, is he its Lord, the supreme object of its desires, the monarch of its affections, the one thing that it seeks, and clings to, and hopes in, and loves? Then, brethren, are we at this moment the charge of Christ, in his care and keeping; then are we set aside to be his recompence and joy. If we love Christ, it is because God has first loved us. If we have chosen him for a Saviour, be assured that he has chosen us to salvation. If we are willing to be his, at his command and disposal, we know the reason—he has made us “willing in the day of his power;” a process is going on within us, which stamps us as his, and which, when it is finished, will place us in heaven among the jewels of his crown.

It follows then that the prayer we have before us, is nothing less than a prayer for ourselves.

II. Let us consider, in the second place, *the blessings it supplicates*. These appear to be two.

1. The first is *the presence of Christ, and that in heaven.*

In a limited sense, the Lord Jesus is with us on earth, but then he is often with us, as he was with his two mournful disciples in their way to Emmaus, undiscovered; he walks by our side, but through the weakness of our mortal nature, we see him not, and even to his face we often mourn his fancied absence. And when the veil is for a moment removed, when we feel that our beloved Master is actually near us, that he has entered within our very souls, O how soon does he disappear! how quickly are the wonderful manifestations of his presence gone! He breaks the bread of joy, blesses it, and gives it us, and then vanishes out of our sight. At the best too it is only by faith that we see him. He is invisible even when most enjoyed.

Now this state of things is for the present good for us, but it is not fully satisfactory either to us or to him. We long to be with him as we are one with another; as Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus, were wont to be with him; as the redeemed in heaven are with him: and he himself is not contented with knowing the blessedness of his heavenly glory alone, or with a portion only of his church; he deems his blessedness even on his throne not fully perfect, till he shares it with every soul that is his. And this communion, this par-

ticipation of feeling and desire between the exalted Saviour and ourselves, should cause this very feeling, this very desire, to be pleasurable to the soul; should give it renewed ardour and strength; should make us "long to depart that we may be with Christ." It should encourage the hope that as we are one with him now in heart, so shall we be eventually in state and happiness.

And mark where the presence of Christ is to be enjoyed. He prays that we may be with him "where he is." Now, in the spirit, he is every where. He is God, and, as God, he fills all space with his existence. He must speak therefore here of that world wherein he manifests his presence, where he is seen and known, where he is in the body, where he even now dwells and reigns as the glorified Son of man. And this is to be not only with the most glorious Being in the universe, but with him in the most glorious place; not in a marred or even renewed earth, but in the place which he calls his own kingdom, his own city, his own house; a world which he has built to shew forth his power, to declare his greatness by its magnificence as gloriously as any material things can display it; so gloriously, that, when we see it, we shall deem it almost worthy to be the foundation of his throne and the temple of his presence. To be with him there, is to be with him in a world from which all sorrow, and care, and

sin, are excluded ; where not a single unholy feeling is ever experienced, not a single tear shed, nor sigh breathed ; where the weary soul may rest, and the troubled soul be quiet, and the tempted soul repose, and the fettered soul be free. It is to be with him not alone, but with the highest and best society the wide universe can afford ; with cherubim and seraphim, with the patriarchs and fathers, with apostles, and prophets, and martyrs. It is to meet again in his blissful presence the companions of our youth, the parents, and children, and friends, whom death has separated from us, or distance severed, or infirmity estranged ; and to meet them where death can touch them no more, where distance can never intervene, nor passion disturb. In a word, it is to be where the Lord Christ himself delights to be ; where he finds the materials, the fulness, of joy for his own wonderful soul. It is to see his face in its brightness, to hear his voice in his happiness, to sit down at his glorified feet, to be an object of his contemplation and delight. It is for the abased members of the body to be united to the triumphant Head ; it is to meet the Bridegroom in all the radiance and joy of the bridal morning ; it is to be with, and to be one with, the incarnate Jehovah in Jehovah's own everlasting heavens.

2. Hence our Lord connects *the sight of his glory* with the enjoyment of his presence ; he seems to

pray for the one because it leads to the other. "I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."

And now, brethren, what are we to understand by the glory of Christ? There is no difficulty in telling what interpretation our grovelling minds, if we did not check them, would give to this language. We should place our blessed Master before us in a form of more than angelic radiance, surrounded with a brightness such as no human eye has ever gazed on, and worshipped by the countless hosts of countless worlds. We should strain our imaginations to paint a scene of unearthly splendour. But after all, what should we have done? Little more than betray the earthliness of our own souls. Instead of shewing how high an incarnate God may rise, we should rather shew how low, amidst the objects of time and sense, an immortal spirit may sink. The chief glory of the exalted Saviour consists not in such things as these. It is a spiritual, a moral glory. It is independent of situation or circumstances. It flows not from the throne he sits on, nor the world he dwells in, nor from any thing of an outward nature. A cross could not impair, the sceptre of heaven can scarcely augment, its greatness. It is the glory of his perfections; the honour that results to him from the

manifestations he has made of his holiness, and power, and wisdom, and grace. Some of these manifestations are revealed to us now, they are visible on earth ; but the view we get of them here is partial and obscure, when compared with their effulgence in his own distant heavens. We know not indeed all the modes in which he is there unfolding his excellencies. They may exceed our conceptions in their variety, as much as they will assuredly surpass them in their nature and extent. But scripture seems to warrant the conclusion that the chief glory of Christ even in heaven, emanates from the work he has performed in this fallen world. There can be no doubt but that this was the glory he had more immediately in his mind at this time. He speaks not of "the new heavens and the new earth," of that splendid universe which will succeed the present marred creation, and make the morning stars once more sing together with admiring joy ; he alludes not perhaps to his own form of heavenly beauty ; he refers mainly to his glory as the once abased but now triumphant Mediator, that exhibition of his perfections which is displayed in his redeemed church ; in the mode of its redemption, in the greatness of that happy multitude which compose it, in their exaltation, their purity, their bliss, the homage they render him, and the homage rendered him by all his creatures on their account,

the fervour of their adoration and praise. Saint Paul tells the Thessalonians of the glory of the Lord Jesus in the day of his appearing ; he connects it with his presence ; and then he immediately adds, "He shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." The glory which their salvation will throw around him, will constitute, in the scene of his proudest triumph, his highest honour ; it will be so amazingly great, that the Holy Spirit describes him as coming down from the heavens to claim it and take it as his own. It is too a glory of which the redeemed can form the best estimate, and in which undoubtedly they must take the deepest interest. It is mixed up with themselves. They are the honoured instruments of its manifestation and display.

This glory Christ prays that we may be with him to behold ; but do we not see it now ? Yes, brethren ; if we are really on our way to heaven, God "has already shined in our hearts, to give us there the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ." There are moments when it almost overpowers our minds with its brightness. But what, even in these favoured moments, do we discern of it ? About as much as a man just emerging from blindness beholds of the ocean, when he takes of it his first wondering glance. We must be with Christ where he is,

before we can form one adequate conception of its greatness. We must escape from a world of littleness and shadows, this scene of delusive pomp and empty glitter. Our souls must be set free from their prisons of dust. They must be rectified in their judgment of things, and enlarged and refined in their powers, by the air of a nobler world. We must wake up to a sense of spiritual beauty; not that faint and transient sense of it, which distinguishes the heaven-born Christian now, and, weak as it is, elevates him high above his fellow-men; but to such a perception of its excellence, as annihilates the splendour of all outward greatness, and leaves us nothing to admire in any creature, except the traces we can discover in him of his Creator's likeness. And then at last we shall see our glorified Master in some measure as he is, and the consequence will be, we shall be changed into his image. The sight we shall get of his greatness will make us great. It will transform us, assimilate us to the Being we admire. Here already a resemblance is begun between him and us; it began from the moment when we first lifted up to him the eye of faith; this vision of his heavenly glory will complete it; not indeed bring it at once, no, nor ever, to its perfection, but make it at once so close, so comprehensive, so transcendent, that the astonished soul will deem itself almost absorbed in the radiance of its Lord.

“We know,” says Saint John, “that when he shall appear, we shall be like him;” and how do we know this? He tells us; “we shall see him as he is.”

These then are the blessings which Christ here supplicates for us. What more could he have asked? O that our prayers for ourselves always rose as high! They could not rise higher. The noblest archangel among the hosts of heaven could not wish for more; he could not raise his mind to take in the whole nor the half of blessedness like this. “Happy are thy men,” said the queen of Sheba to Solomon, “happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee;” but what is the presence of Solomon to the presence of Christ? “It is good for us to be here,” exclaimed Peter on the mount of transfiguration; but what was that wondrous mountain with its shining cloud, and its celestial visitants, and their glittering raiment? The eye of man bore the sight of it; but, “I fell at his feet as dead,” said John, when he saw the Saviour’s glory in heaven; he twice fell down in heaven to worship even the reflection of this glory in an angel’s form. And what would Peter say now of the happiness of that once splendid hour? It was a foretaste of heaven; but no more like heaven, than Peter, the fisherman, on the lake of Galilee, was like Peter, the blessed, near the throne of God. It was the

happiness of a babe compared with the tide of joy that sometimes for a moment runs through the breast of a satisfied and happy man. It was less. It was the first gleam of the morning that announces the rising sun, but gives us not one faint idea of its mid-day effulgence.

III. It remains now that we enquire *what light this prayer throws first on Christ's own character and then on our condition.*

1. We may certainly trace in it *human feeling*, two at least of the ordinary workings of the human heart.

We are all conscious that if we tenderly love a friend, his mere presence is pleasurable to us. We wish him to be where we are, even if we desire nothing of him and receive nothing from him. There is a gratification in simply being by his side. David felt this, and felt it towards his God. He expresses it strongly ; "In thy presence," he says, "is the fulness of joy." We are all conscious too of another tendency of our nature. Let any great or signal good be conferred on us, let our hearts glow with any fresh accession of joy, provided that joy be not excessive, our first impulse is to make those whom we love acquainted with our happiness. We scarcely begin to enjoy it fully till they are enabled to rejoice in it also. Nay, brethren, which of us, at some time or another, has not

thought his mercies and joys saddened, half lost on him, because those who would have shared in the gladness they impart, can know nothing of them, are lying unconscious in the grave? Our children, when unchecked, are daily manifesting this feeling in their little pleasures; and if we turn to the last interview of Joseph with his brethren, we shall find there a touching instance of its strength. It was a moment of great excitement. He had just given way to the struggling emotions of his soul, and discovered himself to his astonished brothers; and now this natural feeling forces itself out most conspicuously. His father must know, and know at once, of his elevation and greatness. "Haste ye," he says, "and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt." And that one earnest charge does not content him. "Ye shall tell my father," he says again, "of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen."

And now look, brethren, at the man Christ Jesus. He is about to be separated from the friends he loves, to be removed as far away from them as death can sever him. And how does he act? They are to be left in an ensnaring world; he prays for them therefore, in the first place, that they may be kept from its evils; and then he prays, as though he were praying for himself

rather than for them, that they may be with him again, that "where he is, there they may be also." It is impossible to read this prayer and the address which precedes it, without discovering the tender and almost intense pleasure which the Saviour derived from the company of his disciples, the sorrow which he felt at the prospect of losing it, and the quiet but yet deep pleasure with which he looked forward to enjoying it again. As for "the joy that was set before him," the idea that they would ultimately behold it, that they would find their chief happiness in the contemplation of it, appears to give it in his mind new power and value.

And is it not cheering, brethren, and useful also, to trace in our beloved Lord such feelings as these? They seem to bring him so very near us, to render him so easily approachable, to set him before us as so exceedingly attractive, they so encourage and sweeten our communion with him, that we can scarcely think of them too often, or dwell on them too much. If any one will turn this cup of mercy into a poison, will push this matter farther, and place sinful feelings, the corrupt tendencies of our fallen nature, in the heart of that Being whom all heaven adores for his holiness, I would say to myself, "O my soul, come not thou into their secret;" I would say to you, Not for worlds believe them. Carry your view of

the humanity of your incarnate God to the utmost bound that perfect purity will go; you cannot then carry it too far; scripture will go with you all the way; but to pass that bound, to conceive of the great Lord of the heavens as having been tainted at any time with our base appetites, and corroded with our vile affections, to look on him from whom must proceed every holy desire and right feeling that can enter our minds, as having admitted into his own mind any thing that defiles—the thought is appalling; we could not harbour, we could not tolerate it for a moment, if we had once caught the faintest glimpse of the exalted Saviour as he is, or had one just conception of his glory.

2. We may discover also in this prayer *the strength and tenderness of our Lord's love*. They are both to be traced in its self-denying, absorbing character.

Our manifestations of affection towards the objects of our regard, come from us when our minds are not much taken up with our own concerns, in intervals of leisure and repose. Acute sorrows, or any deep emotions of pleasure, leave us but little inclination to enter into the joys or griefs of others. We become almost inevitably more or less selfish, and want to receive sympathy rather than impart it. But not so Christ. He was now drawing near the hour of his crucifixion. Stand-

ing on the very verge of that fathomless sea of woe, through which he was about to pass, we might have supposed that every thought of his mind would have been given to it, that he would not have had a feeling within him for any other than himself. But what is the fact? If he has not forgotten his own approaching miseries in the sorrows of others, he acts as though he had forgotten them: his last employment before his agony begins, is a long and painstaking effort to comfort a few troubled hearts. His disciples are cast down at the prospect of losing him; he talks no more, he seems to think no more, of Gethsemane, and Golgatha, and the terrors of Calvary; every power of his mind is called into exercise to chase away their grief. That was the triumph of love over fear and anguish; look now at another triumph it achieved over hope and joy.

These emotions were at this time in active exercise in the Saviour's breast. We are told that "for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame;" he had such a foresight of the glory which awaited him, so ardent a desire and so vivid an expectation of entering into it, that he rose superior to the scenes of darkness which separated it from him. Hope triumphed over fear. It did not annihilate it, but it wrought more powerfully; it destroyed all its ruling and much of its harrowing strength.

But it could not force love to give way. With all its mighty influence and all its unutterable blessedness, it left the Saviour as much alive to every feeling in his disciples' hearts, as though he had not a single emotion in his own.

And look at him yet again. His work of suffering is now past. He is on the mount of Olivet, about to go to his long looked for glory. The cloud that is to receive him, is hovering over him; the everlasting gates are opened; all the hosts of heaven are waiting with eager expectation for their returning King; he hears them making the very heavens ring over his head with their acclamations of triumph. There is but a moment, but a step, between him and the utmost joy that even his soul can know. And where are his thoughts? In heaven, amidst its splendors and joys? No, brethren; among his disciples still. "He lifted up his hands and blessed them." He goes up into heaven, looking down on those whom he loved on earth; almost leading us to believe that he left them with reluctance; that he had rather stay and share their labours and sorrows, than go up to his heavenly joy alone.

There is no measuring of Christ's love for his people. It is an unconquerable love. Sorrow could not make him neglect, nor can joy cause him to forget them. No situation can impair, no circum-

stances can alter, his love. It has the mastery of his infinite mind.

3. We see, lastly, in this text, *the certainty of the Christian's salvation*.

It is certain, for it has not only been purchased for him by the most precious blood that was ever shed, ensured to him by the most solemn promises, and taken possession of in his behalf; it is an object of desire, of earnest supplication and prayer, by no less exalted a petitioner than the Son of God. And not only this, his own glory and happiness are concerned in our attainment of it. We are his charge, and he must not suffer us to perish; we are his reward, and he will not lose us. From our salvation flows much of his own honour; he has condescended to make us necessary to his own eternal joy. The scripture speaks as though his bliss were not complete without us. "He shall see," it says, "of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." He rejoices now, but he rests not in his joy, he is not satisfied till we share it. True, we are vile as the dust we tread on, worthy only to be dashed to pieces by his arm, or preserved in existence as awful monuments of his displeasure; but he mixes us up with his glory, involves his own felicity as man with our salvation; and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than this connection be severed, than our souls be lost. If we have given ourselves to

him, as surely as we now breathe the air of earth, we shall see his face in his own happy heaven. We may for a time, like these disciples, be in heaviness and sorrow, have yet many a weary year to pass in a disappointing, and harassing, and exhausting world; we may, like them, lose sight of our Lord; our expectations from him may waver, and our hope may perish; we may sometimes well nigh be tempted to forsake, and at other times be hardly able to cleave to him; but all this while, this petition concerning us stands registered in heaven; all this while, it is the desire of Christ, the longing of his soul, that we we may be "where he is, and behold his glory."

With such a prospect before us, so glorious and so certain, shall we not say one to another, Let us lift up our heads with joy amidst the troubles of this evil world? This prospect seems to annihilate our troubles: we wonder that they should ever draw from us one tear or sigh. We are to sojourn in Mesech but a little longer; we are soon to take our leave for ever of the tents of Kedar; we are already within the distant rays of that glory which is our sure inheritance; and can the light afflictions of this present time have more power to depress, than that "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" has to elevate and gladden us? O no! Our concern shall be to feel, and live, and act, like men who are going to a

happy and holy Saviour in a holy and happy world. We will labour to have "our conversation in heaven;" to catch something of its spirit before we enter into its joy.

And one word to you, brethren, who fear that these things concern you not. Have they enkindled your desires? Have they excited in you one wish that Christ were yours and you were Christ's? O carry out that wish, turn those desires, into fervent prayers. You behold here a praying Saviour, you hear him praying for the salvation of his own ransomed people; have you no reason then to pray for your own? And does not this prayer shew you what Christ really is? in what he delights, and in what his joy, and his blessedness, and his glory, lie? Whatever your fears may say, they lie in this one thing, in saving souls, in carrying just such souls as yours, lost, and sinful, and wretched, to a pure and blissful world. Commit yourselves then to him. Look upwards and supplicate that faith in him, which will place you in his hands. It is no unattainable, mysterious thing. It is nothing more than a simple belief in the testimony of God concerning him, a giving credit to his promises, a confidence in his power, his goodness, and his love. Approach him with this, and, in that moment, he will number you among those that are his; he will cleanse you from all your sins in the fountain

of his precious blood ; he will cover you with a “robe of righteousness;” he will clothe you in the spotless “garments of his salvation;” he will keep you by his omnipotence; and as surely as you close your eyes in death, so surely, when you open them again, you shall see the face of your Redeemer, see him as your Redeemer, and be welcomed by him as his own.

SERMON XVIII.

THE CHRISTIAN IN THE WILDERNESS.

HOSEA ii. 14, 15.

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she shall sing there as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.

LITTLE as the Israelites were permanently benefited by their sufferings in the desert, they appear never to have forgotten them. Centuries passed away, but they still associated ideas of wretchedness with the scene of their fathers' wanderings. Hence "the wilderness" became another word for trouble and sorrow. It bears that meaning here. It signifies a state of desolation, a condition re-

sembling in its difficulties and miseries the situation of afflicted Israel in the howling desert. Happy are they who are led by any means into any state, that discovers to them the meaning and truth of this gracious promise !

I. It points out to us, in the first instance, *the Author of affliction*.

And he makes no attempt to conceal or disguise himself. On the contrary, he rather forces himself on our notice as the source of his people's troubles. It was the Assyrian army, that laid Israel waste ; it was the cruelty of her enemies, that desolated her country and carried her into a wretched captivity : but not a word is said in this chapter of man or his violence ; the God of Israel seems determined to keep all but himself out of our sight. " I," he says, " will take away my corn and my wine." " I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees." " I will cause all her mirth to cease." " I will visit upon her the days of Baalim." " I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness."

Now why this anxiety in a God of love to stand thus forward as the Author of misery, and misery, observe, among the people he loves the most ? For two reasons ; first, because we are so backward in affliction to discern his hand. We say indeed when it comes, " It is the work of God," but we do not half believe what we say ;

we have no deep or lively impression of its truth. There is often lurking within us a conviction directly opposed to it. Else why that restless anxiety in trouble to look so closely into second causes? Why are our minds continually going over the circumstances that have led to our calamities? Why does one of us say, "Had this been let alone, my buried friend might have been spared?" And another, "Had that been done, my poor child might not have sunk?" And a third, "In any other situation, my withered health might have stood firm?" There may be some truth in all this, but the incessant dwelling of our minds on it shews how we labour to push God out of our concerns, how unwilling our vile hearts are in all situations to acknowledge or even perceive his hand.

But he has another reason for ascribing to himself our trials;—we can get no good out of affliction, no real comfort under it, till we view it as sent to us from him. The man of the world regards affliction as "coming forth of the dust," and trouble as "springing out of the ground;" it is the necessary result, he conceives, of our present condition and circumstances; God has little or nothing to do with it, save to comfort us under it. And where is the benefit that he derives from sorrow? It works in him no submission, it brings out of him no praise. It is when the mind

discovers God at the very root of its sufferings, when it sees him with his own hand desolating its comforts and robbing it of its joys ; when every grave seems dug by him, and every loss and every pang are felt to be his work ; when it cannot banish him from its thoughts, nor disconnect from him one of its griefs, nor even wish to do either ;— it is then that the soul begins to bethink itself, and the heart to soften, and man's proud, rebellious, stubborn spirit to give way. Then the knee bends, and the prayer goes up, and the blessing comes down. Then, for the first time, we are quieted and subdued. "I was dumb," said David, "and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." "It is the Lord," said Eli, and then that poor old parent could add, "Let him do what seemeth him good." And this conviction will carry us yet farther. Only let a man once see that a Father's hand has mingled his cup of bitterness, and he will soon do more than say, "Shall I not drink it?" His heart may be half breaking, but there is something within that heart, which, ere he is aware, will force his lips to praise. "The Lord gave," said Job, "and the Lord hath taken away;" and then comes this noble but yet natural exclamation, "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

II. The text shews us next *why God afflicts us*; at least, it discovers to us one of the most frequent causes of our sorrows.

And this may appear to some of us scarcely deserving of the miseries which are ascribed to it. It is nothing more than forgetfulness of God, and that not in his judgments, but in his mercies; a failing to recognize his hand in them.

Look to the eighth verse of this chapter. "She did not know," says God, "that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil; and multiplied her silver and gold;" "she knew it indeed, but she did not remember it; she did not practically acknowledge it; she did not act, she did not feel, as though I had any thing to do with her blessings; she accordingly prepared them for Baal; she devoted them to her lusts and her idols." "Therefore," he adds, "will I return, and take away my corn and my wine." And again in the eighth verse, "She went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the Lord; therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness."

Not one word, brethren, need I say to convince some of you, that God acts thus still. You have lost some of your earthly mercies, perhaps your best; those which you valued more than Israel ever valued her wine and her oil, or you ever valued your silver and gold; and lost them too, it may be, in some unexpected hour or manner. Your neighbours can hardly tell why God has thus stepped out of the ordinary path of his providence to deprive you of them, or why he has deprived

you of them at all. They speak of "his way being in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps," they say, "are not known." But you use no such language. In your view of them, there is not an atom of mystery in his dealings with you. You know why he has stripped you bare as well as though his own voice had sounded it from heaven in your ears;—you had forgotten him in his gifts. You loved them so well, and prized them so highly, and leant on them so confidently, and drew out of them so much help, so much comfort and sweetness, that at last you deemed them all-sufficient, you allowed them to draw your heart from God; you not only forgot him in them, but you forgot, in the enjoyment of them, that you needed any thing beyond them; you tried to live "without God in the world." God saw this, and he would not suffer it. In jealousy for his own honour, in love for your souls, he withdrew the gifts you had abused. He made you feel once again that you need him, that no one can possibly need him more; that if he takes from you all that is his, you stand as starving beggars in his universe; you have nothing left, save that which you cannot get rid of, misery and sin.

And you who are still encompassed with earthly blessings, learn here how easily they may be lost. If the perversion of them forfeits them, if not to

discover and own God in them endangers them, which of you, as he thinks of his health, his reason, his property, and the use he has made of them, has not reason to fear? Which of you as he looks around on his children and friends, has not reason to tremble? God will not deprive you of them without a cause. O no! He would not rob needlessly the meanest creature that breathes, of the meanest joy. But he must and he will be acknowledged by all his creatures in all his mercies. If you will not see him in the possession of them, he will make you see him in their loss. He will lay bare his arm and snatch them away. And, mark, not when they are worn out, or cease to be useful, or you are grown weary of them; but at a time and in a manner that will startle you, that will compel you to trace their removal to his hand. "I will take away my corn," he says, "in the time thereof; and my wine in the season thereof." "My gifts shall be withdrawn, when my people just begin to deem themselves sure of them, when they least expect to lose them, when they are most of all the objects of their love, and expectation, and joy."

III. We learn farther in the text *how God sometimes afflicts us*. It describes him as doing it compassionately, gradually, tenderly. "I will allure her," he says, "and bring her into the wilder-

ness;" "not drive her thither, not force her there; but I will go before her, and lead her on, and make her willing to enter with me the dreary waste."

This however is not always God's way of acting. Sometimes his judgments appear to come on his defenceless people with the suddenness of lightning and the violence of the hurricane. But who are these on whom he thus rushes like an armed man? Generally the strongest, if not the holiest, of his saints; men of powerful minds and naturally of unusually proud hearts, and yet men of great experience in the ways of godliness, tried, weather-beaten Christians; men who require a hard blow, and know how to get strength to bear one; men who have learnt much of God's mercy, and want now to be taught, the last thing that man ever learns, God's sovereignty. Or else they are men of great sins, or intended for great usefulness, great honour, and a great reward; a David, or a Job, or a Paul.

But take the young and inexperienced of Christ's flock, he carries them into the wilderness in his arms. A mother's tenderness could not equal his. There is no describing it as it manifests itself towards them on their entrance into trouble. He does not deceive them; no, he tells them plainly that they are going and must go into tribulation, that there is no other way to his kingdom; but he

reasons with them, he persuades them. He shews them how much they need affliction, how much good they will derive from it, how near it will bring them to him, and how much it will make them like him, what heavenly consolations he has provided for them under it, and with what unspeakable joy he will bring them out of it, how glorious the kingdom, and inheritance, and rest, to which it leads. And then when the blow is at last struck, he is so mindful of their weakness, so alive to their fears, letting the weight of sorrow fall on them so gently, and putting into them so much strength to bear it, and mingling with it so much undisguised and unexpected mercy, that the men are in the very thick of the wilderness almost before they discover that they have taken in it a single step. They go down into it, if not as cheerfully as though it were a paradise, yet so willingly, that there is not a paradise to be found on the earth, that could tempt them to turn away from it. Other men are driven into the wilderness, nothing can reconcile them to it; the Christian is allured thither. Like Moses, he "chooses" affliction. Like David, he says, "It is good for me." Like his divine Master, he would not rush out of it even if he could. Nature may shrink for a moment, it may almost rebel, nay, it may quite rebel, and that for far longer than moments or hours, but nature does not triumph; the man

prays it down. He places himself at last as a child in his Father's hands, and so that he is there and knows that he is there, he is content. Among all the people of God in this suffering world, there is not one who would not prefer the dreariest path in the dreariest desert with Christ by his side, and the consolations of Christ in his heart, to the brightest and most joyous of all earthly scenes without him.

IV. We have now entered the wilderness. Consider, in the next place, *the comfort the Lord imparts there.*

He says of Israel, "I will speak comfortably unto her." But this is not the exact rendering of the words; we must go for that to the margin of our Bibles. We read there, "I will speak to her heart." How exquisitely natural as well as touching is this language! None but a man of affliction, or a God who knows what is in man in affliction, would have thought of it. Others speak comfortably to us in sorrow, but if that sorrow is deep, what power over us have their words? In most cases, they have none. They may be kind words and right words, they may deserve our gratitude and have it, we may feel ashamed of ourselves that they have so little of it; but they can no more get to our hearts when God has really wounded them, than they can restore our blessings

or raise our dead. It is amazing how completely barred in these seasons the soul often feels itself against all that can be said to it. The wisest reasonings, the most earnest and touching persuasions, can gain no access. They are no more to us than the whistling wind. They are rather a weariness than a relief; they distract the head without easing the heart. Nay, what have our Bibles themselves sometimes been? As powerless as our neighbours. "What a comfort must this blessed book now prove to that poor sufferer," says a Christian friend, as his own quiet soul is drawing consolation out of it; but the fact perhaps is, the book lies beside that man for hours unopened, and when it is taken up, he wonders where its power and sweetness are gone.

And how long does all this last? Just long enough to shew us that there is no comforter but God; just long enough to make us feel our own utter helplessness, and the poverty and nothingness of every thing around us. It lasts till we are forced to lift up a wretched, half despairing cry to heaven for consolation; and then what follows? O brethren, that every one of you could tell! The power to tell would be cheaply purchased by a few sighs and tears; yes, by some of you at a price that you would tremble to pay. God now speaks. He spake indeed before by the friends he sent to us and by his word, but then it

was to the ear ; at the best, to the understanding ; he speaks now to the heart. And could the wondering mourner shew you what his words have done there, you would say of such a mourner, and say it of him while in the wilderness, in the very depth of his tribulation, "O that my soul were in his soul's stead !" The great Comforter of the church has vindicated his honour ; he has taught the soul whence its consolations must come, if they come at all ; and now they are poured into it with the tenderness of a Father and the omnipotence of a God. Now every thing comforts it, for God speaks by every thing. A word affects it. And as for the Bible, no tongue can tell the eagerness with which its promises are embraced, or the solace they impart. So powerful is it become, that perhaps one declaration in it is the stay of the soul for days or weeks. The man says, "Were that one text the whole of my Bible, did I find nothing more in it to comfort me than I find there, it would be enough : I could not be wretched."

But consolation is not all that an immortal spirit needs in sorrow. Need however or desire what we may, there is a promise of it in this text.

V. It calls our attention next to *the supplies which God furnishes in tribulation*. He represents himself as more than a Comforter in it ; he

is a Benefactor and a rich one. We are promised vineyards in the wilderness, and these vineyards our own. "I will give her," he says, "her vineyards from thence."

Now by this language we are to understand, not always or generally a restoration of the blessings we have lost, but such blessings as will abundantly supply their place, and at the same time exactly meet our wants and our wishes also, in that state of destitution into which we are brought.

And they are blessings too that in some sense or other God deems ours. He considers that we have a property in them, for in a very marked manner he calls them ours. And not without reason. They are blessings purchased for us by the blood of Christ, set aside for us in the ages of eternity by his sovereign grace, and secured to us by his never-failing covenant. We have no natural claim to them, no power in ourselves to take hold of or retain for a moment any one of them; but they are all become as completely and lastingly ours, as infinite goodness and love, as infinite faithfulness and power, can make them. We know what they are; not those poor mercies that we faintly ask for in our hours of ease, but those richer vineyards, those higher mercies, for which the soul in its misery most aches, and which the heart, when its desires are drawn forth in affliction by heavenly consolations, most thirsts for

and seeks ;—support, submission, patience, faith ; thankfulness for the past, all the past, quietness for the future ; deeper convictions of the world's emptiness, of the misery of sin, of the worth of the soul, of the Saviour's preciousness ; the giving way of evil desires and habits, and the rising up of holy affections ; prostration, and, at the same time, freedom and elevation of spirit ; thirstings after God ; thoughts ascending to heaven and almost piercing into it ; a close, and realizing, and wonderfully blessed view of eternal things ; the light of God's countenance ; a sense of his presence.

And how strange an origin is ascribed to these blessings ! And how strange the scene of our enjoyment of them ! We have no conception by nature of being free from want, of being satisfied and happy, in bereavements and troubles. How should we ? We know nothing of any happiness save that which the objects around us give ; and whence, when these wither away, is our happiness to flow ? We can conceive of patience in affliction, of support and even of some degree of consolation there, but as for the heart being filled, as for its strongest desires being all gratified and the soul content—we can give credit to no such representations ; we say at once that we might as well look for the light of day at midnight. This text however speaks of “ vineyards ” in a wilderness ; not of corn and oil, observe, the necessities

of life in an eastern land ; but of wine, its refreshment and gladness, and this to be found and this to be enjoyed, where nothing of the kind could be looked for, where the ordinary traveller expects only desolation, amidst the barrenness and famine of a desert. And more still ; these blessings are not only to be ours in affliction, they are actually to be the effects of affliction, to grow out of it ; to be produced by those very things which cause our sorrow. “ I will give her her vineyards from thence.” “ The wilderness which is the source of Israel’s sufferings, shall be the source also of her consolations and joys. They are my gifts, and that she may see them to be mine, she shall gather them not in her own fertile country, but on the arid sand.”

And representations like these are of frequent occurrence in scripture. Half its promises are promises of blessings in sorrow, and blessings from sorrow. It speaks of joy in tribulation ; of consolations abounding when sufferings abound ; of tears as the seeds, joy as the harvest ; of patience, experience, and every Christian grace, all wrought by trouble, all made to flow by the power of the Holy Ghost from tribulation alone. It goes farther. That eternal blessedness which is the purchase of the Redeemer’s blood, the perfection of Jehovah’s workmanship, the noblest effect of his power, and the richest gift of his goodness, the

scripture traces even this to suffering, and to slight suffering. It describes it as sorrow's easy, rapid work. "Our light affliction," says the troubled Paul, "which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." We must not, I know, brethren, overrate affliction, but with such a declaration as this before us, how can we overrate it? As long as we represent it as utterly powerless in itself, how can we ascribe more to it, when in the Spirit's hands, than the apostle has ascribed to it here? He gives it the praise even of the happiness of heaven; we must be in heaven perhaps before we can echo with our full feeling such words as these, but some of you can tell us that the brightest hours on earth are those which sorrow brightens. Your richest supplies, your sweetest comforts, have been sent you in your deepest troubles. For you "the wilderness and the solitary place have been glad, and the desert has rejoiced and blossomed as the rose." "The Spirit has been poured upon you from on high, and then the wilderness has been a fruitful field." You have had your vineyards in the desert and from the desert. Its barren ground has been the ground of all others where you have been most blessed. In looking back on your earthly pilgrimage, in going over the years during which you have trod its wastes, you are constrained to say, you rejoice to say, "My most afflicted days have been

my happiest. I have been restless, half miserable in the day of my seeming happiness, but in the day of my adversity, I have been tranquil, I have been satisfied, I have sung for joy."

VI. But the text still carries us on. It bids us notice *the hope that God excites in affliction*. "I will give her," he says, "the valley of Achor for a door of hope."

Now this valley was situated at the very entrance of the promised land. It bordered on the wilderness, and was the first part of Canaan that came into the possession of Israel. Hence it must have seemed to them, after their wearisome sojournings, as the birthplace of hope; their hearts must have glowed as they entered it with the prospect of soon obtaining as their own the whole land. And here we have a clue to the prophet's meaning.

"My people shall not remain for ever in that wilderness," says God. "I led them there, and I am blessing them there, and they shall be blessed; but that is not their home. While they are suffering under its toils and rejoicing in its mercies, they are travelling far away from both, and sooner or later they shall see whither they are going. I will shew them a way out of the wilderness, and that not a way which will take them back again into Egypt, to the scene of their former sins and wretchedness; it shall bring them to

Achor; they shall see themselves on the very borders of their promised inheritance."

And there is an Achor for you, Christian brethren. Some of you well know that there is, for you have found it. You remember the time when heaven seemed as far from you, as the divine justice or your own guilt could remove it. Your hearts often longed to see that it would eventually be yours, but you could not. You reasoned, you "took counsel with your soul," you tried all the means you could think of to work yourselves into a conviction of your eternal safety, but all failed you. The utmost you could ever attain to, was a hope fluctuating with the feeling of every day, and often scarcely to be distinguished from positive despair. That was the time of your worldly ease and prosperity. At last came trouble. You saw the wilderness before you; you found yourselves in it. "Now," you said, "my misery is sealed. My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord." But when you had been some time in the desert; when God had spoken comfortably to you there, and began to pour into your wounded hearts his wine and his oil; when you saw that you did not sink as you expected to sink, but that, on the contrary, you experienced a consolation and blessedness you never knew before; then, for the first time, you rose above the fears that all your life long had oppressed

you. You rose almost above your supports and comforts. You looked beyond them. You said with Manoah, "If the Lord had been pleased to destroy me, he would not have shewed me such things as these." The sins he subdued in you, the graces he quickened, the compassion and tenderness he manifested, the discoveries he gave you of his favour, appeared to you as indications of his special love. As you ate of the vineyards of the wilderness, you regarded them as the forerunners of the feast of heaven. "Tribulation worketh patience," says Saint Paul, "and patience experience, and experience hope;" and you have at last learned to say the same. "It is good," you now say, "that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." "Thou which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side." "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel and afterwards receive me to glory."

And what has been the design of God in all he has done for you? in the comforts he has bestowed, the supplies he has given, and the hope he has inspired? The text will tell you.

VII. Notice in it, lastly, *the effect to be produced on Israel by the mercies vouchsafed to her.* "She

shall sing there," says God, "as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt."

"A song of joy," you perhaps say, brethren. Yes, of such joy as few ever sing out of the wilderness of trouble, as none ever know save those who in trouble are "rejoicing in hope of the glory of God;" but there is something more than joy in this song and something higher.

The Lord here reminds us of the hour when Israel saw herself free and safe on the borders of the Red Sea. Her enemies were engulfed in its waters, and she herself was on her way to Canaan. That was the day of her youth. He then refers us to that exulting hymn with which she made the shores of that sea re-echo on the discovery of her deliverance. I need not say that it is a hymn of wonderful beauty and fervour. But the most striking characteristic of it, I conceive, is the high strain of adoration which it breathes. The people seem overwhelmed with the display that had been made to them of the divine perfections, and under the influence of the admiration which these perfections had excited, their joy is almost lost in feelings of adoration and praise. True, they do say "The Lord hath saved us;" it is true that they speak of him as their song because he had been their salvation; but the chief burden of their song is "the high praises of their God."

“Sing ye to the Lord,” they cry and cry again, “for he hath triumphed gloriously.” “Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power.” “Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee? glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders.”

Now if you have experienced great consolations, great mercies, in affliction, be assured of this, that they have elevated unspeakably your thoughts of God; that they have been accompanied with such a view of his glory, as delights, and warms, and almost fires, your soul. You cannot be silent concerning it. You have seen your “King in his beauty,” and you must speak of him and his beauty. He has opened your lips, and you must “shew forth his praise.” “He has put a new song in your mouth,” and you must send it forth; “even a thanksgiving unto your God.”

You remember the feelings of your hearts, brethren, on your first conversion to God; how strong they were; what influence they had on your feelings, your words and conduct. You remember too how mournfully they half subsided away. When God brings you into trials, and helps and comforts you under them, he does it to revive those feelings of your better days, to make you in zeal and love what you were years ago, and perhaps have never been since. “I remember thee,” he says, “the kind-

ness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals." He wants that love again, the fervour of your first love; and he wants this, that you may answer the great end of all he has done for you, that you may "shew forth his praise." If then this end has been in no degree attained, if you have talked of the spiritual supports and enjoyments you have known in adversity, and yet are come out of it as worldly minded, as cold hearted, as trifling, as little impressed with the divine goodness and glory, as when you entered it, tremble for yourselves, tremble for every one like yourselves. There is a matter far more important to you and to me, brethren, than earthly trials, or any consolations we can experience under them. We are drawing near an eternal world. We shall die as surely as those dear to us have died; we shall go to the judgment seat of the living God. God will not ask us there, what comfort we have had in our afflictions. No; the question there will be, what have we been in our joys and our sorrows, his friends or his enemies? While we have been experiencing his supporting mercy, what have we experienced of the cleansing of a Saviour's blood and a Saviour's Spirit? What have we known as great sinners of the great Deliverer? Compared with enquiries like these, the things you have heard to-day are trifles. O forget them all, rather than forget this one awful fact, we are dying sinners drawing near every moment to heaven or to hell.

SERMON XIX.

THE MULTITUDE FED IN THE WILDERNESS.

ST. MARK VI. 42.

And they did all eat and were filled.

IT is a remarkable fact, brethren, that of the many miracles wrought by our Lord, this is the only one recorded by all the evangelists. The inference we are to draw is plain—it is a miracle of peculiar importance. It was deemed such evidently by those who witnessed it; it is stamped as such by that Holy Spirit who has thus written it again and again in the book he has inspired.

And there is no difficulty in perceiving wherein its importance lies. We shall undoubtedly find it in the developement it affords us of the Saviour's character; in the discovery it makes of his goodness and greatness; in the force with which it tells a needy world, that he is able and willing to

satisfy all its wants, to the greatest possible degree, under all circumstances, at all times. We must view it then in this light; that is, we must look on it as a striking though partial exhibition of the Lord Jesus Christ, his excellencies and his ways. And may he himself open our minds to receive the knowledge of him it is calculated to impart!

Our attention must necessarily be confined to a part only of the history. Let us take these four points;—first, the miracle itself; then, the feelings with which our Lord seems to have wrought it; then, the time when it was performed; and, lastly, the place where it occurred.

I. *The miracle* was the feeding of a large multitude of men with food sufficient for a small number only, and leaving among them, after every one was satisfied, a larger quantity of provision than could be found in the place at first.

1. Now the first thing that strikes us here, is *power*; power over the material world.

And this to material beings like ourselves, is a concern of no small moment. We are surrounded with material things. We live among them and upon them. Our comfort, our safety, nay, our very life, are made dependent on them. With the body they can do what they will; and through the body, they can get at the soul, and affect it

deeply ; send it out of the body, naked and lonely, to its everlasting home.

In such a situation, the mind, when the mind thinks on the subject, naturally asks, Have the things around me any master, any ruler? and if so, who is he? "The Lord Christ," answers the gospel. It exhibits him to us as the Monarch of the world he has formed ; with all its parts under his control, and every element in it at his command. On this occasion, food, in simply passing from hand to hand, is multiplied at his bidding, so that five thousand eat and are filled from a meal prepared perhaps for five. And this is no solitary instance of the obedience of matter to him. He treads on the sea, and it sustains his weight ; he speaks to the winds, and in a moment the hurricane sinks down into a calm.

It follows then, brethren, that when we make light of Jesus of Nazareth, we are making light of one who can never be at a loss for an instrument to punish or destroy us ; one who can arm all nature against us ; send the lightnings of heaven to blast, or give a feeble moth power to crush us.

It follows also, that the stores of nature are to us just what he is pleased to make them ; that food, and air, and medicine, do his work and nothing more.

And does not this also follow, that in the material, as well as in the spiritual world, his people

are safe? They may suffer perils to alarm and difficulties to oppress them, but they need fear no evil. He who is watching over them, has boundless resources at his command; ten thousand unthought of ways of removing danger and supplying want. "The silver and the gold are his," and so "are the cattle on a thousand hills." Yea, "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." He has proved himself its Master. At his nod the sea has divided to give deliverance to his people; a flinty rock has poured out water to minister to their comfort; and when they have wanted food, he has rained it down upon them from the clouds. There may be in our houses only a barrel of meal and a cruse of oil; but what then? "We shall not want." He who has given us but that little, will make that little enough, and make us wonder that it is enough; "filling our hearts with food and gladness."

2. Notice also in this miracle *the little value which Christ puts on sensual gratifications; on luxuries and what we call comforts.*

We have seen his power; it was evidently boundless. A word from his lips could have spread before this multitude all the delicacies of the east. But in calling his omnipotence into exercise for them, the only food he provides is the mean fare of the humblest fishermen. Their souls he had just before been feeding with the

bread of life ; nothing he deems too good for them ; he was willing to give the food of angels for their support, nay, himself ; but when their bodies are to be fed, any sustenance that is at hand, contents him. A few barley loaves will answer that mean purpose, as well as the most sumptuous fare. He will have no waste ; he says even of this plain food, "Gather up the fragments;" he sets some value on every thing he gives or creates ; but as to the value he sets on that which pampers the appetite, it is so trifling that we cannot discover it.

On another occasion he acts in precisely the same manner. He provides food for Elijah, the greatest and best man of his age ; and sends a messenger from heaven to carry it to him ; and what is it ? It comes to a prophet from an angel's hand ; and yet it is only a cake of bread and a cruse of water.

How instructive is all this to the poor and straitened ! How forcibly does it say to you, "Be content with such things as ye have !" You may fare hard, but there is not one of you, who does not fare as well as the Lord of nature fared in the days of his flesh ; and yet he ate his food with thankfulness, and never wished it better.

And how strongly does this plain meal condemn others of us ! It says nothing, brethren, about taking and enjoying what God has given ; his

gifts are sent us to be enjoyed; but that caring about the things of the body, that eager indulgence in them, the thought and time they occupy, that making them necessary to us, that restlessness and discontent which we experience when, owing to any accident, we cannot get them;—what is all this? It is folly. It is worse; it is sin. It is more than sin; it is an indication of a bad state of heart; a proof that there is little, if any thing, spiritual within us; that the mind is still in its native earthliness; that it knows nothing whatever yet of a new and heaven-born life. Put the grace of God into the heart, implant there the love of Christ, let the soul once taste the sweets of his presence, let it but catch for one moment the joy that he can bestow; and we shall care but little about what we eat, or what we drink, or what we put on. Christ in the heart will drive all such care as this out of the heart; will assuredly bring content into the heart. And there is no way of getting content there without Christ. Purple and fine linen will not do it; no, nor faring sumptuously every day. Discontent can reign over a mansion as ceaselessly, and in a palace as tormentingly, as in a cottage. It sits down at a well spread table far more often than at an humble board. It feels most at home amidst luxury and pomp. Our old writers often say, and say it with as much truth as point, “Nature is con-

tent with little, grace with less, sin with nothing."

II. Let us pass on now to *the feelings with which this miracle was wrought.*

1. One of these was evidently *a consciousness of power.*

Not that it was wrought ostentatiously, for the purpose of exciting astonishment or extorting applause; no, it was a work of pure benevolence, of kindness and compassion, with no vain shew whatever in it; nay, with a concealment of power, rather than a display of it. But who can read this history and not see that the Being who wrought this wonder, knew himself able to work any wonder? that he felt his omnipotence? Look at the scene.

"Send the multitude away that they may get food," said the disciples. "They need not depart," said the lofty Saviour. Their words sounded to him like an impeachment of his character, like an injury done to his greatness; and conscious power prompts his answer. "A starving multitude sent away from me for bread! why all the bread on earth or in heaven is mine. They need not depart." And what does he say again? "Make the men sit down." And this, observe, was said before the food was multiplied; said by one in a human form, with only five loaves and

two small fishes before him, in the presence of more than five thousand men ; and said with a composure and confidence, that indicated a certainty in his own mind as to the result of what he was doing, no doubt whatever as to his own ability to provide the food desired. Or rather perhaps we ought to say, the Saviour's whole demeanour in this transaction indicates an absence of all thought whatever as to his own power ; such a habit of doing wonders, of bringing to pass whatever his wisdom and his compassion dictated, that he does not give his own ability a place in his mind. He thinks no more of it, than we think of our power to open our lips when we speak, or of our power to step when we walk. And thus comes out the hidden Godhead. It is seen in the miracles he performed, the wonders he accomplished, seen clearly and gloriously ; but it is more visible still perhaps in the manner in which he wrought these wonders, in the quietness, the ease, the dignity, the conscious greatness, with which they were accompanied.

2. We have thus seen him as God ; but he is as really man as he is God, and as man, a creature ; and he feels as a creature ; for mark further *the spirit of devotion* that he manifests.

“ When he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes,” says the evangelist, “ he looked up to heaven and blessed.” And he did this, not

merely to teach the multitude around him to acknowledge God in the bounties of his providence, and to praise him for them, but from a real feeling of dependence at work in his own mind, from the overflowings of gratitude towards his Father in his own breast.

It seems too that this was nothing more than his usual practice. Look at that blessed meal he ate at Emmaus after his resurrection. There was nothing peculiar in the nature of it. It was not a miraculous meal like this wonderful provision before us ; nor was it a sacramental meal like his last supper at Jerusalem ; it was an ordinary repast taken in an ordinary manner at the close of day. And yet we read that "as he sat at meat with his two disciples, he took bread and blessed it ;" and the action discovered him ; "their eyes were opened" by it in a moment, "and they knew him ;"—a clear proof that his expressions of thankfulness for his daily food were not reserved for special occasions, that they were more than the decent formalities observed by his countrymen, that they were so constant and so fervent as to characterize him. His heart-warming discourse did not betray him. The disciples themselves say that "he was known of them in breaking of bread."

And why all this ? Why this bringing of devotion to bear upon the trifles, the routine, of life ?

Because God is in all these trifles ; because we have not a single enjoyment or comfort which he does not give us ; because moreover we are commanded to acknowledge him, to glorify him, in every thing. "Whether ye eat or drink," says his Holy Spirit, "or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Besides, where there is real devotion in the heart, it will appear, and appear habitually, in the life. There is no confining of it to the church or the closet ; it is within the man, and wherever the man goes, his religion will go with him. It will be visible in his dwelling and at his table, as well, and often as much, as in the temple of his God. It is become a part of himself ; no longer what it was once, a garment to be put on at one time and thrown off at another, but as inseparable from him as his form or his life.

True religion, brethren, is not an act, but a habit ; not an impulse, an emotion, but a principle ; not a sudden torrent, however wide or impetuous, produced by the snows of winter or the thunder storm of summer ; no, it is a stream ever running, varying indeed in its extent and depth, but, from the moment of its rise, ever flowing on till it ends in everlasting life. Banish God from your meals, banish him habitually from any thing, you might as well banish him from every thing. Your religion is a notion or a form, and will prove in the end a delusion.

3. Notice also *the largeness of mind*, the liberality, with which our Lord spread this wide board for this vast multitude.

“The two fishes divided he among them all ; and they did all eat and were filled.” None were excluded, none were controlled, none went away dissatisfied. There was enough and to spare. And had the number of these five thousand men been multiplied a thousand fold, it would have been the same ; the evangelist would still have told us with the same simplicity and truth, “they did all eat and were filled.”

And think not, brethren, that you can ever exhaust the power and grace, or diminish the fullness, of your almighty Saviour. You may come to him for the pardon in one moment of the sins of a whole life, and these sins may be as many in number as the moments you have breathed, and as dark in their character as the desperate wickedness of your own vile hearts, it matters not ; “with him is plenteous redemption ;” “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin ;” “he will abundantly pardon.” And if you come to him again, he will pardon again ; he will “multiply pardons.” And did you come with a throng of sinners more numerous than the sands of the sea shore, and all as deeply laden with iniquities as yourselves, you would be pardoned as soon and pardoned as freely ; and when you looked around

on that guilty multitude, not one unpardoned transgressor would you find among them all; no, nor an unpardoned sin. And when you turned your wondering eyes again on your merciful Lord, you would see him waiting still to be gracious, his love would be as overflowing, his forgiveness as ready and as free, his power as vast, his invitations as extensive, his pleadings as earnest, his heaven as open.

And if you come to him for any other mercy, yea, for all the mercies that a creature finite like you can receive, or an infinite God can give, you may have them all, and in an abundance that you can no more measure than you can span the universe. "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think." "He is a God full of compassion and gracious." As he spreads his table in the wilderness, this is his call to a world of sinners, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." And this is his promise to his Zion, "I will abundantly bless her provision, I will satisfy her poor with bread,"

III. *The time chosen for this miracle* calls now for our notice.

The thirty-fifth verse says that it was wrought in the evening, "when the day was now far passed;" when the disciples began to be concerned for the safety, at all events, for the comfort

of the people. And not only so, the loaves were not multiplied till these disciples had been taught that they could do nothing for the hungry crowd. "They have nothing to eat," said they. "Give ye them to eat," answered Christ; thus reminding them of their utter inability to help themselves or others. And that this delay was the effect of design, not of accident, may fairly be inferred from a still longer delay which took place before the performing of a similar miracle on a similar occasion. Then Christ began first. "In those days," we read in the eighth chapter of this gospel, "the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them, "I have compassion on the multitude because they have now been with me three days and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way." And why this delay? Why not have fed these multitudes earlier? Why keep them till they were thus spent? For their spiritual benefit, for our soul's good; to shew us this—our Lord's determination to make his creatures feel their wants before he supplies them; to bring out our weakness, to lay it bare, before he manifests in us his strength. This mode of proceeding runs through all his dealings with us, whether in providence or in grace. He humbles us "under his mighty hand,"

before he exalts us ; he breaks our hearts, before he heals them ; he causes us to groan under the burden of our guilt, before he removes it ; he never conquers our lusts for us, before he has taught us to discover and hate them. Nay, anxiously as he desires our holiness, it is not till we are brought to “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” more than for any thing else, that we are filled. And when has he given us strength, and consolation, and joy ; those pleasures, brethren, which have almost turned the earth into a heaven ? It has been when we have found out that there are no pleasures any where else ; when we have felt ourselves poor, and our friends poor, and the world poor, and the whole universe poor ; when our hearts have been fainting with sorrow, and well nigh given up to wretchedness. It is a blessed thing for God to empty the soul ; a blessed thing to have self-righteousness, and self-dependence, and all earthly confidence, beaten down. It is a sure forerunner of mercy, and of mercy such as this—great mercy, striking mercy, mercy that makes us wonder as we receive it, mercy that satisfies, mercy that is like this miraculous bread, as we eat of it we are filled.

IV. And this is nearly the same truth that our fourth subject will suggest to us ;—*the place where this miracle was performed.*

The scene of it, we are told, was a desert; a barren shore of the lake of Galilee; a place unproductive of provisions, and remote from any visible means of supply; the last place, in fact, in which these men expected to eat and be filled. And more than this, it was a desert wherein the Saviour had led them; at least, they would not have been found there had he not gone there before them. They followed him thither.

You discover then at once, brethren, the lesson you have here to learn—our richest supplies, our best comforts, are not the growth of our worldly prosperity, nor often the companions of our worldly ease; they come to us in situations and under circumstances, which seem to cut us off from every comfort and supply. We receive them in affliction, and never so abundantly as in those deep afflictions, those extremities of suffering or trouble, into which our Master himself has the most visibly led us. And not only so, they often seem to grow out of our afflictions. We are fed in the desert, and by food which is created in the desert, and which, as far as we can see, we should never have had put into our hands had we not been in the desert.

This miracle seems like a practical commentary on that strange but gracious promise of Jehovah sent by Hosea to the Jewish church; "Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness,

and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence;" "her vines shall spring up where nothing ever grew before but briars and thorns."

And what have your own lives been, Christian brethren? They have all been in harmony with this miracle and this promise. Think of the deserts in which you have wandered.

Outward affliction has been one of these. You have been in it, and dark indeed were your fears as you entered it; and yet did your souls starve? Did you sink down exhausted in that wilderness? "Your foot had well nigh slipped," you almost for a time fainted; but the supply came at last, and turned that scene of desolation into a fruitful land. O what vineyards have you had from thence! what refreshments have been sent you there from on high! what support, and love, and tenderness, have you experienced! Often when an object of compassion perhaps to earthly friends, you have been singing aloud with happiness and praise.

Spiritual sorrow too, conviction of sin, is another wilderness; a dark and fearful one; none on earth more fearful. Who does not remember the wonder, and confusion, and terror, of that hour, when God first made him feel he had a guilty soul? But what did you ultimately get out of this desert, brethren? What came out of all these fears and

alarms? A discovery of redeeming love, an insight into the virtue and glory of the Saviour's cross, a peace, a hope, a joy in believing, which have done for you, what?—not reconciled you to your guilt;—God forbid!—but which have caused you to deem the discovery you have made of that guilt the greatest blessing of your life. If there is one thing for which you are thankful, it is this, that you have trembled under the burden of sin and wept under a sense of your pollution.

O never let us fear the desert, as long as we are there with the Lord Jesus Christ. A thousand times over has he furnished for his people a table in the wilderness, and never on this side heaven, will they be any where else so well supplied. In other spots, there is often hunger amidst seeming plenteousness; our souls have felt it, and been well nigh famished; but look through the whole church, look at that great multitude who have shared its sorrows; we may say of them all, when Christ has allured them and led them into the wilderness, they did all eat and were filled.

And here I must end, not however without suggesting to you this one reflection;—*How glorious a Being is the Lord Jesus Christ!*

Look once more at the scene this scripture presents. One man standing amidst a multitude of five thousand men, and satisfying them all with

his single hand; and that not from any supplies of food previously collected, but creating food as he distributes it, and creating and distributing it as long as any one will take it, and doing all this without an effort or a boast, with thankfulness and prayer;—there is indeed greatness in this spectacle, a silent but mighty greatness, that no royal banquet, that no external pomp, that no earthly pageant, ever yet displayed. But after all, to what does it amount? The Lord Christ feeding for an hour one company with the bread that perishes! Why, brethren, he has been feeding for ages the whole multitude of heaven with imperishable joys; and the time is fast coming on, when around him will be assembled, not five thousand, but ten thousand times ten thousand of his saints; all the spirits in all the worlds, that he has redeemed or upheld; all filled and overflowing with happiness, and not a thrill, not an emotion of happiness to be found among them all, which has not him for its Creator and Giver.

O the glory of that Being who is the sinner's refuge and hope! What an amazing power to bless is there in him! What an inexhaustible, infinite fulness! To be fainting with want, to be starving and perishing, while such a Being says, "I am the bread of life;"—if you have never wondered before, go away and deem yourselves now the greatest wonders in the world. A happy,

redeemed sinner in heaven makes all heaven marvel; but a sinner starving on earth, with such a Saviour near him as Jesus Christ; a man destitute of the food his soul needs in a Christian country and in a Christian church, with the tidings of the gospel sounding in his ears and the blessings of the gospel waiting his acceptance;—there is no wonder greater, none half so awful. And yet some of us must say, “That wonder am I; that creature starving in the midst of plenty; carrying about an empty soul without a wish to have it filled; never once asking mercy for it, and trampling every moment on the food that would save and satisfy it;—that wonder am I.” And what will be the end of it all? Prayer or ruin; conversion, a mighty change within, or death; an awakened, renewed, supplicating, abased soul here, or a starved soul, a lost soul, for ever.

THE END.

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