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SERMONS.

BY

DR. DODDRIDGE.

SERMONS,

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

BY

PHILIP DODDRIDGE, D. D.

PROPERTY OF
PRINCETON
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PUBLISHED BY J. HATCHARD AND SON, PICCADILLY.

1826.

C. and C. Whittingham, Chiswick.

ADVERTISEMENT.

The Manuscript from which this work has been printed consists of four volumes of Sermons, which were selected from the mass of Dr. Doddridge's unpublished discourses shortly after his decease, and in accordance with the following injunction in his Will: "I also desire that four octavo volumes of my Sermons may be printed by subscription for the benefit of my

family, which I would not appoint if I did not also hope that it might be yet more for the benefit of the world, and that fruit may thereby abound to me at the day of the Lord. I desire that Mr. Orton, who is the best judge of this, will select such as he judges most fit to be published. I desire, also, that those that are already transcribed in long hand may be inserted." The Sermons alluded to as "already transcribed" form a considerable number, and are, in the MSS., distinguished by the Author's autograph; of these the last two in the fourth volume were printed singly soon after their de-

livery: but as they were contemplated by their Author as forming a part of the present series, and as having an integral connexion with it, they are now necessarily reprinted. Of those, which were selected and transcribed from the Doctor's shorthand after his decease, it may be proper to observe, that "the transcripts were carefully collated with the original shorthand copies by Doctor Ashworth, during the period that the Daventry Academy was under his care," as appears from a letter addressed by a gentleman once connected with that academy to the late Mrs. Doddridge, from which

the passage marked by inverted commas has been extracted.

It may be observed, that the clause in the Will bears the most explicit and imperative character; but the publication was very properly deferred at that time, as duties of a more pressing nature remained to be fulfilled. Of these the first was the completion of the Family Expositor, the last three volumes of which were posthumous, and were brought out under the superintendence of the late Rev. Job Orton; and, as that important work was published by subscription, to solicit another

subscription, without any intervention of time, for a production of the same Author's, was felt to be indelicate and improper. Mr. Orton's next publication, therefore, from the Doddridge Manuscripts, was a collection of original Hymns*; and this was succeeded, in 1766, by his admirable Life of his holy friend. In this year Mr. Orton's health became so much affected, that he found himself compelled to resign his pastoral office at Shrewsbury; and to retire to Kidderminster.

* Hymns written on each of the texts of the Sermons contained in these volumes appear in this collection.

PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Hence, at such intervals as were granted to him by his bodily infirmities, he favoured the world with a portion of his own works; a task rendered so laborious to him by the accession of much nervous malady, that we cannot feel surprised that the publication of these volumes, now presented to the world, should remain unaccomplished at his decease in 1783. After this event the MSS. were transmitted to Dr. Doddridge's widow: but paralysis, from which she had suffered for many years previously to her death, with other domestic circumstances, prevented her from taking any active step

with respect to their production. By the survivor of her family, the late Mrs. Celia Doddridge, the MSS. in question, together with a variety of other family papers, were bequeathed to her nephew, my late excellent father. But his sequestered situation as an invalid, precluded him from adopting any direct measures for their publication. The business, therefore, remained undetermined at the time of his decease; and, as he left no directions on the subject of their publication, it is now deemed most judicious to print the whole of the four volumes, without any reservation, as the plan most likely

to prove satisfactory to the Public. This has accordingly been done; and I feel a conviction that the pious hope which the learned Author has so solemnly expressed will be amply verified by their effects.

John Doddridge Humphreys.

Tewkesbury, 1825.

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SERMON I.

OF BEHOLDING THE GLORY OF CHRIST IN HEAVEN.

JOHN, xvii. 24.

Father, I will that those, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me.

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IT is hardly possible to take a text out of this part of St. John's Gospel without some notice of the connexion; for there is no part of the Book of God which abounds more with the sweetest and with the strongest consolations than these discourses of our dying Redeemer. It is most affecting and edifying to observe, as we go along, the tender regard which he expresses for his disciples, and his kind concern that, when he was to be separated from them, he might not leave them comfortless. As he perfectly *knew what was in man*, he knew how most effectually to command all the secret springs and movements of the soul, and accordingly he speaks to

SERM. I. them, in a sublime neglect of those little ornaments and artifices of speech which may amuse the imagination, but can never penetrate the heart. The divinest grace was poured upon his lips[1]; and it was as true of his consolations as it was of his instructions, that *he spake as never man spake*[2].

[1] Ps. xlv. 2.

[2] John vii. 46.

He assures them, in the former chapter, that he was going away from them, not out of any resentment or unkindness towards them, but with the most friendly purposes, and for the advancement of their truest and most important interest; that the separation would not be perpetual, for *he would come again*, and receive them to himself; and that, in the mean time, he would send down the Spirit from his Father, who should more than supply the want of his own bodily presence.

Having thus endeavoured to assuage their sorrows, and to establish their hearts in a holy tranquillity and joy, he turns himself to his Father in a most comprehensive and affectionate address, which is recorded in this seventeenth chapter. The prayer may be divided into three parts; the first immediately concerns our Lord himself, the second his apostles and others who were then his dis-

ciples, and the third, of which my text is a part, comprehends those also who should afterwards be converted to the sincere profession of the Christian faith, though in the remotest nations and ages. *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word*[3]. So that you see, my brethren, that if we are Christians indeed, our gracious Redeemer was now praying for us. And we may be sure that the blessings he asked were worthy of his petition, and will be worthy of our pursuit. They are chiefly these two; our peace and unity upon earth, and our happiness in heaven. The first of these is most emphatically expressed in the two preceding verses, *that they may all be one, even as we are one;* the latter in the words of the text, *Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold the glory which thou hast given me.*

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[3] ver. 20.

Our Lord was now going to ask the best of the divine favours for his followers and friends, that on which his own heart was most affectionately set, that on which their happiness most entirely depended; and therefore to intimate his earnest desire of obtaining it,

SERM. I. he addresses himself to God by a most endearing compellation, "[*Father, I will*] I importunately ask it, and in virtue of the mutual stipulations which have passed between us, I with filial confidence claim and demand it, [*that those whom thou hast*] *chosen to thyself* from the face of sinful mortals, and by a peculiar covenant [*given to me*], to be redeemed and sanctified and saved [*may*], to complete thy purposes of love to them and of honour to me, at length [*be*] brought to be [*with me*] in that world of exaltation and glory [*where I am*], i. e. where I shortly shall be; [*that they may behold that glory which thou*] as my God and Father [*hast bestowed on me*] as man and mediator, in consequence of that love wherewith [*thou lovedst me*] as thy first elect, whom, [*before the foundations of the world*], thou didst constitute to be *head over all unto thy church.*"

This seems to me the genuine sense of these words; and I question not but you see that I might easily, on this occasion, introduce many of the most copious and intricate controversies in divinity; but I choose to wave them. Thus much is undeniably plain, that our Lord Jesus Christ prays that his people

might be with him in the heavenly world, and there be entertained with the sight of his glory. Let our thoughts centre in this subject; and may the Divine Spirit so assist our meditations, as that we may be animated to the most ardent desires, the most cheerful hopes, and the most vigorous pursuits of it! In handling this excellent portion of scripture, I shall, SERM. I.

I. Consider what this glory is which our Lord prays that his people may behold.

II. Show that it must be a great happiness to the pious soul to be admitted to the sight and contemplation of it.

III. Prove that this shall be the happiness of every true Christian in the future state; and then,

IV. Conclude with some practical reflections.

I. I am briefly to inquire what this glory is which our Lord here prays that his people may behold.

But, alas, what shall we say of it? When St. Paul was caught up into the third heavens[4], and saw this glory, he found it to be an unutterable thing. How then shall we [4] 2 Cor. xii. 3.

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describe it, or how shall we conceive of it? We who dwell in this world of distance and darkness, and from whom *he withholdeth the face of his throne*[5], we should not dare to undertake so unequal a task, were there not some traces of this glory drawn in his word. Let us humbly view the intimations and descriptions which are there given, without attempting to be wise above what is written, or daring to intermix any bold conjectures of our own.

[5] Job xxvi. 9.

From scripture we learn that the person of Christ appears in heaven with amazing brightness and glory; that he there receives the humblest adorations from all the created inhabitants of that blessed place; and that the supreme administration of the affairs of Providence is by the Father lodged in his hand. This is the glory referred to in the text, and which he prays that his people may at length behold.

1. The person of Christ appears above in surprising lustre and glory.

St. Paul speaks of the glorified body of our Redeemer as the pattern after which our vile bodies shall be fashioned at the resurrection[6], and our Lord has assured us that in that

[6] Phil. iii. 20.

illustrious day *the righteous shall shine forth as the sun*[7]; undoubtedly therefore the bright original has a far transcendent lustre of his own. SERM. I.

[7] Matt. xiii. 43.

There is an author, whom some suppose to be of considerable antiquity*, who tells us that when our Lord Jesus Christ appeared upon earth, though in the common condition of human nature, and in a state of deep humiliation and abasement, there was a remarkable beauty and majesty in his countenance. The fact is in itself highly probable, and some commentators† suppose it favoured by those prophetic words of David, which undoubtedly refer to the Messiah, *Thou art fairer than the children of men*[8]. Now we may assure ourselves that whatever was beautiful and graceful in his person when on earth is vastly improved, now he *is set down at the right hand of his Father in heaven.*

[8] Ps. xlv. 2.

It is impossible for us particularly and certainly to say what change there may be in the organization and form of our Lord's body, now it is raised to this glorified state; but we may depend upon it that there are some sig-

* Lentuli Epist. ap. Fabric. Cod. Apoc. v. ii. p. 302.

† Rivet. Ford.

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nal improvements. A great and illustrious change was wrought in it, when he was transfigured on the mountain; which may perhaps in some measure assist our ideas in the present inquiry. We are told that the fashion of his countenance was altered, that *his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light*, it probably appearing with such incomparable lustre, by means of those rays of glory which shot forth from every part of his body, which was covered by it[9]. The subject may also receive some farther illustration by consulting the descriptions which are given us of those forms in which Christ (who was in the form of God[1]) appeared to the prophets under the Old Testament, and to the apostles after his ascension. When Isaiah saw him, he was upon *a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple*[2]. In the vision of Ezekiel, *his throne was as a sapphire stone*, his whole body had *the appearance of amber, and the brightness of fire, and a rainbow was about his head*[3]. When Daniel saw him, *his garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like wool; his throne like a burning flame, and the wheels of his chariot like fire*[4]. When he appeared to St. Paul on his way to Da-

[9] Matt. xvii. 2 Mark, ix. 3. Luke, ix. 29.

[1] Phil. ii. 5.

[2] Isa. vi. 1.

[3] Ezek. i. 28.

[4] Dan. vii. 9.

mascus, he was surrounded with a light that far outshone the splendour of the sun at noon[5]; and lastly, when he favoured the beloved apostle St. John with a visit, *he was clothed with a robe down to his feet, and girt about the paps with a linen girdle; and his hair and his head were as white as wool, nay, even as snow, and he had seven stars in his right hand, and his countenance was as the sun when he shineth in his strength*[6]. SERM. I.

[5] Acts xxvi. 13.

[6] Rev. i. 13.

It is not for me to pretend to determine how far these passages are to be understood allegorically, as some of them certainly are, or how far any of them may be expressive of the form of Christ's ordinary appearance amongst the blessed; but I think they all concur to illustrate and confirm this general observation, that the person of Christ in heaven is wonderfully glorious and majestic, and this is one part of that glory which he here prays that his people may behold.

2. The glory we are considering farther consists in the homage which is paid to our blessed Redeemer by all the created inhabitants of the upper world.

We should rationally have concluded that such homage was addressed to him, though

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it had not been expressly described or asserted in scripture. Certainly those perfected human spirits, which are made happy in the immediate sight and enjoyment of God, and who are sensible that they owe this felicity, consummate and eternal as it is, to the merit and the sufferings of *the Lamb that was slain*, cannot possibly be wanting in the humblest acknowledgments of his bounty and his love. And though the angels are not so intimately concerned in the redemption which he has wrought, yet they cannot but honour and worship *the Man Christ Jesus, who hath obtained a far more excellent name than they*[7], by being admitted into an incomprehensible personal union with God, and honoured with the amplest communications of perfection from him which a created nature can be supposed capable of receiving. Agreeable to this is that declaration of the apostle, *When he bringeth his only begotten Son into the world, he saith, let all the angels of God worship him*[8]; and elsewhere *God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, as well as upon the earth and under it*[9]. And once more St. Peter

[7] Heb. i. 4.

[8] Heb. i. 6.

[9] Phil. ii. 9, 10.

has told us that *Christ is gone into heaven, where angels, and principalities, and powers are made subject unto him*[1]. Now we may certainly conclude that if they are his subjects, they do in a proper manner pay their homage to him, under the character of their Sovereign Lord. And to make the matter still clearer, this homage and adoration, both of angels and saints, is at large described in the Book of the Revelation; where the beloved apostle tells us that he *saw the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fall down before the Lamb*, and adds, *And they sung a new song; and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, saying, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing:* and every creature which was in heaven (not excepting the brightest archangel there) *heard the saying, Blessing, and glory, and honour be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever*[2]. You see by this remarkable text, that the whole quire of angels and immortal saints bow before the throne of our exalted Redeemer; they sound his name upon their golden harps, and lay their crowns at his sacred feet. This is a

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[1] 1 Pet. iii. 22.

[2] Rev. v. 8—13.

SERM. I.

part of that glory which the Father hath given to him, and which he here prays that his people may behold.

3. Another very illustrious branch of the glory of Christ in heaven consists in the supreme administration of the affairs of Providence, which is now lodged in his faithful and powerful hand.

The Father has constituted our incarnate Redeemer the great regent of the universe, and all the events which are produced in it are conducted by his wisdom, and effected by his interposition. Thus the Baptist expressly tells us; *The Father loveth the Son, and hath committed all things into his hand*[3]. And elsewhere our Lord says, *All power is given unto me, both in heaven and on earth*[4]. And thus in the words of St. Paul[5]; *God hath put all things under his feet, and given him to be head over all.* And whatever be the import of that expression in which we are told, that *at the end he shall give up the kingdom to God, even the Father*[6]. I think it cannot possibly signify, as Witsius* and Crellius† strangely

[3] John iii. 35.

[4] Matt. xxviii. 18.

[5] Eph. ii. 22.

[6] 1 Cor. xv. 24.

* Sicut unus ex fratribus—in honesto otio. Wits. in Sym. Ex. x. § 44.

† Gloria—compensabit imperium illud et honorem. Crell. in Lec. v. 1. p. 332—6. Yet he afterwards allows Christ such a principality over the redeemed, as archangels have over their legions, p. 333—6.

agree to expound it, that he shall as it were abdicate or lay down his commission, and retiring to a private station become like one of his brethren; for that would be inconsistent with the dignity derived on his human nature by its most intimate union with the Divine, as well as with the scriptures, which in the strongest terms assert the perpetuity and eternity of his kingdom. It is inconceivable, that the ensigns of royal dignity should ever be laid aside; and most of all, that he should quit them in that illustrious day when the great work of redemption shall be complete, and all his chosen shall appear in their highest triumphs. We may conclude, therefore, that the Apostle, by *giving up the kingdom to the Father*, only intends some solemn acknowledgment that shall then be made, of the supreme dominion of Him *who hath put all things under him;* or some change in the form of the administration of his kingdom, which shall be suited to that more excellent and glorious state of things which is to succeed the great Rising Day. But as long as the saints behold their Redeemer in all the ages of a triumphal eternity, they will still behold him as the *King of kings, and Lord of lords;* and the views of his power, as well as his dignity

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and lustre, will constitute a part of that felicity which shall arise from this beatific vision.

This, my friends, is such a description of the glory of Christ as the Spirit of God hath given to us in scripture: but certainly, if we are ever so happy as to be brought to the immediate sight of it, we shall acknowledge "that the half has not been told us[7]," and that God himself hath spoken of it not in a full proportion to the dignity of the subject, but in humble and gracious condescension to the weakness of our understandings, and the dulness of our apprehensions. I now proceed,

[7] 1 Kings viii. 7.

II. To prove that it will be a great happiness to the pious soul to be admitted to the sight and contemplation of this glory.

Now what I have to offer on this head is rather intended to assist your pious meditations, than to inform your understanding in a truth which is too clear to be denied, or so much as to be suspected. It will appear that it must be an unutterable pleasure to the souls of good men in heaven to behold the glory of Christ, if we consider the greatness of this glory itself, and the peculiar interest which they will have in it.

1. This will appear, if we consider the greatness of the glory itself.

The mind of man is so formed as to be necessarily delighted with splendid and magnificent spectacles; so that a philosopher once said, he could be contented to die for a sight of the sun, if he might but be allowed to approach so near that illustrious luminary of heaven, as to have a full view of its lustre.* Now surely the splendour of the meridian sun is but a faint emblem of that, in which *the Sun of righteousness* shines in the upper heaven with rays that gild all the region, and adorn, and delight, and animate every blessed inhabitant of it. Were a new-created angel to be introduced to such a scene; were he to view Jesus appearing *as the only begotten of the Father*, arrayed in garments of celestial light, attended by the shining courtiers of heaven, and armed with the irresistible power of the Almighty, he would surely behold it not only with astonishment, but with rapture; and might delightfully pass away eternal ages in attending his throne, and ministering around it. But,

2. There are some very important circum-

* Eudoxus ap. Diog. Laert.

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stances which will make such a view abundantly more entertaining to the soul of a sincere Christian, than it could be to such a stranger spirit. For it will be the glory of one in his own nature, the glory of his Redeemer and his friend, and he will behold it as the pledge and security of his own immortal felicity.

1. In the glory of Christ in heaven, the Christian will behold his own nature exalted to the highest honour and dignity; and this must render the view peculiarly delightful.

When we are arrived at the utmost degree of perfection and happiness in heaven, we shall still be men; and shall still retain a peculiar affection for our own nature: and consequently it must fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory, to see that nature so intimately united to God, and shining forth in such distinguished grandeur and majesty: to consider that he, who was once *made a little lower than the angels*[8], *being found in fashion like a man*[9], is now made *head over all principalities and powers;* that he who is still the *man Christ Jesus*[1] receives the kneeling adorations of the most exalted cherubims, and hears all heaven resounding with his praises.

[8] Heb. ii. 9.
[9] Phil. ii. 6.
[1] 1 Tim. ii. 5.

And, whatever advantages in any other respects may attend the ancient and original inhabitants of the celestial world, it must doubtless intitle us to some peculiar regards from those illustrious, yet condescending spirits, that the Lord of Angels still appears in our nature, and is not ashamed to call us his brethren.

2. It will be a very great happiness to the Christian to behold the glory of Christ in heaven, "because he will consider it as the glory of his Redeemer and his friend;" of a person to whom he is under the most important obligations, and for whom he hath the strongest affection. While believers were on earth, though they did not see him, yet they loved him[2]; and in the strength of faith accounted him the chief amongst ten thousand, and *altogether lovely*[3]. But, certainly, they will love him infinitely better when they *behold him face to face* in all his unveiled glory; as the sight of their prince inspires faithful subjects with warmer and more affectionate sentiments of loyalty. I might also add, that we shall then have much livelier ideas of the love of Christ, in laying aside his glory that he might become our Saviour,

[2] 1 Pet. i. 8.

[3] Cantic. v. 10, 16.

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when we see that glory with our own eyes; and this must proportionably awaken the returns of gratitude and love to him. Now, without doubt, it must be inexpressibly delightful to behold the glory of so beloved a person.

Christians! I appeal to your own hearts. Is it not now a pleasure to you, to think that your Jesus is possessed of all this honour and happiness? and while we were faintly representing the particulars of it, did not a secret joy and triumph arise in your breast, to think that it was the glory of your Lord and your Saviour? and yet, alas! our love to the blessed Jesus is now faint and imperfect, and our views of his glory dark and confused! What then shall it be, when our love shall be perfected, and we *shall see him face to face!* How will our souls then magnify the Lord! how will our spirits *rejoice in God our Saviour*[4]! Surely the intenseness of our love to him will give us a sort of property in his happiness, and we shall exult in it as if it were our own. "Think," says that sublime and pathetic orator, Mr. Bolton*, "think what an inexplicable sweetness it must diffuse

[4] Luke i. 46, 47.

* Bolton, Of Comfortable Walking with God, p. 65.

over the soul, to gaze for ever on the glorified body of Christ in heaven, shining forth with unutterable beauty, and then to think every vein of that blessed body bled to bring me hither."

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Let us for a few moments give scope to so pleasing a meditation. "Oh my soul, how delightful will it be to look upon Jesus in all the glories of his exaltation, and then to say, 'This is my Redeemer! this is He that was crucified for me without the gates of Jerusalem! Now he *is arrayed in white garments*, the robes of honour and majesty; but then *He was red in his apparel when he trod in the winepress alone*, and of the people there was none with him[5]. That head, which is now adorned with a diadem of glory, was once wounded and dishonoured with a wreath of thorns. Those eyes, that now shine with all the sweetness and majesty of an incarnate God, were once bathed in tears when a cup of trembling was given him to drink. Those hands, that now wield the sceptre and the sword, that are the executioners of the divine vengeance, and the ministers of his love, were once extended as on a rack, and torn with irons; and that harmonious voice, which

[5] Isa. lxiii. 9.

SERM. I.

now gladdens every inhabitant of this happy world, and to which angels attend with silence and rapture, was once poured out in a doleful cry on the cross, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me*[6]*?* This, oh my dear companions in glory! this is the man that died for my salvation! But *behold he lives, and is alive for evermore*, and *hath the keys of death, of hell, and of heaven*[7]*! hallelujah! Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and honour, and wisdom, and glory, and strength; for he hath redeemed us to God by his blood, and hath made us kings and priests, and we shall reign for ever and ever*[8]*.'"*

[6] Matt. xxvii. 46.

[7] Rev. i. 18.

[8] Rev. v. 9, 10, 12.

With these acclamations of joy and gratitude shall we for ever surround the throne, and adore the incarnate Deity who is seated upon it. "But oh, my Redeemer, (will the holy soul say) these, my acclamations, are beneath thy regard; and it is but a poor return that I can make to thy goodness, though I be for ever devoted to thy service, for ever on the wing to execute thy commands. I rejoice that thy Father, who alone could do it, thy Father hath assigned thee an ample reward, proportionable to the dignity of thy person, and the riches of thy love; in

seating thee at his own right hand, and exalting thee to all that glory and happiness which I am now raised to see and to adore." Judge by this representation, imperfect as it is, how much it must increase the pleasure of beholding the glory of Christ in heaven, to consider it as the glory of our Redeemer and our friend. SERM. I.

3. It will give us the assurance of our own everlasting felicity; and on that account we shall behold it with a great increase of pleasure.

All our hopes of everlasting happiness depend on God's accepting that satisfaction which the blessed Redeemer hath made on our account. Now God, by raising him from the dead, and advancing him to this glory which we have been describing, does most evidently and publicly declare that his justice is fully satisfied by the atonement already made; and consequently that the main bar to our happiness is now removed.

Moreover Christ is represented in a variety of scriptures, as the great Head of the church[9], through whom life and influence are conveyed to every part of the body. Now it would be a great incongruity to suppose, that while he

[9] Eph. v. 23. iv. 15. Col. i. 18.

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condescends to own such a relation to us as his members, he will suffer us to be miserable whilst he is himself so glorious and so happy. *No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth it, and cherisheth it*[1]; thus does he now tender his church, and he has taught us to encourage ourselves with this when he left us. *Because I live, ye shall live also*[2]; and thus the apostle argues, *Your life is hid with Christ in God, and when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory*[3]. Nay, our Lord expressly declares his gracious purpose, of causing his people even to share with him in the glories of his exaltation; when he says in the words preceding the text, *The glory which thou hast given me, I have given them*[4].

[1] Eph. v. 26.

[2] John xiv. 19.

[3] Col. iii. 3.

[4] John xiv. 22.

Now, certainly, it must be the perfection of happiness to behold the glory of Christ with this thought. "That excellent, that illustrious, that divine person, that I now see at the right hand of the Father, is Jesus, my brother, and my friend: and though I am before him but a worthless worm, he loves me with an affection which is a thousand times stronger than death. And all my affairs are in his hands, and such is the union

between us, that my happiness is inseparably connected with his. How firm, how unshaken the foundation! The Father hath lodged me in his hand, and his fidelity and his tenderness stand strongly engaged to take care of me. Where then is the power on earth, or in hell, that can pluck me from thence, or can molest me there. Jesus is my portion, and Jesus is my defence, and therefore I am inviolably secure and happy. Witness his seat at his Father's right hand, and these legions of angels who attend his command, and who, if it were needful, should all be drawn out for my protection under the command of my Almighty Friend, their general and their king."

Now when we reflect on all these particulars together, I hope it will sufficiently appear, that it must be a very singular happiness to the sincere Christian to be admitted to behold the glory of Christ in heaven; since the glory itself is so great and illustrious, and since he has such a peculiar interest in it, not only as the glory of one in his own nature, but of his Redeemer, and as the pledge and security of his own everlasting felicity. I would hope that you are by all

SERM. I. this, prepared for what I have to lay before you under the third general; where I am

III. To prove that every true Christian has the justest reason to hope that this illustrious happiness will be his own.

Now, for the proof of this point, I shall briefly insist upon the reasonableness of the thing itself, and the express testimony of scripture.

1. This might probably be argued from the reasonableness and congruity of the thing.

We have already proved that the Lord Jesus Christ is already raised to this supreme glory and felicity; and also that the sight of him, in these exalted circumstances, would be exceedingly delightful to the good man. He must, therefore, ardently desire it, he must importunately ask it; and when we consider the share he hath in the divine favour, and that he has the honour of being adopted into the family of God, and of being designed for an inheritance of eternal life; we may reasonably hope that such a petition will not be rejected. Especially when we farther reflect on the relation which Christ bears to his people, speaking of them as brethren of the

same family, as members of the same body; most congruous doth it then appear, that he and they should have their eternal abode together, which implies their being in circumstances where they may behold his glory. But, SERM. I.

2. The matter is put out of doubt by the express testimony of the word of God.

The words which are the foundation of my present discourse, are alone sufficient for the proof of this; since, as I have already shown, they are a petition which he offers not only for his apostles and primitive disciples, but for every true Christian in every age and nation. Now our Lord elsewhere declares with an air of triumph, that he was confident none of his petitions would meet with a denial. *Father, I know that thou hearest me always*[5]. Least of all then would this prayer be turned away, this which was one of the last which he offered before *he poured out his soul unto death*[6]. Cyprian tells us, that when the martyrs of the primitive church were led forth to their sufferings, it was customary for the penitents and other persons in extraordinary distress, to press in upon them and importunately to beg a remembrance in their

[5] John xi. 42.

[6] Isaiah liii. 12.

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dying prayers. But, surely there is infinitely greater reason to conclude that the prayers of a dying Redeemer will prevail for the blessings which they ask. Our Lord was so confident of the success of them, that he scruples not directly and positively to promise to all his people the blessing that he here prays they might be admitted to. *If any man will serve me, let him follow me, and where I am, there shall also my servant be*[7]. And again, *If I go away, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am there you may be also*[8]. And once more St. Paul expressly declares that *we shall ever be with the Lord*[9]: and surely we shall then behold his glory, since it is for this very reason that he here prays we may be present with him. This, my friends, is the sacred charter by which we hold these important hopes. You see that nothing is more expressly asserted in the whole word of God than this, that every sincere Christian shall be with his Redeemer in heaven, and shall behold his glory there.

[7] John xii. 26.

[8] John xiv. 3.

[9] 1 Thes. iv. 17.

IV. It remains that I conclude the discourse with some practical reflections upon it.

SERM. I.

Reflection 1. How great are our obligations to God and a Redeemer, who have raised us to the hopes of such a felicity!

Do but consider how great the felicity is, and you will readily acknowledge, that nothing can equal the love which hath prepared, and purchased, and bestowed it, to be with Christ, and to behold his glory! "Blessed Jesus, (doth the holy soul say) if my most affectionate wishes were to be summed up in one, it should be this; *to be with thee where thou art.*" "When I am with thee now in the retirements of the closet, or the solemnities of the temple, though I see thee but *through a glass darkly*[1], I am transported with the sight. None of the employments, none of the entertainments of life are half so delightful, as a few dear moments spent in thy presence; though, alas! they are too frequently interrupted by the weakness of the flesh, and the wandering of the spirit! I am sometimes ready to envy the happiness of those that had an opportunity of conversing with thee, when thou wert on earth; clothed with a mortal body, and subject to all the innocent infirmities of our nature. Happy were those thy servants who then stood before thee[2]. What a sacred pleasure

[1] 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

[2] 1 Kings x. 8.

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would it have been to me, to have traced thine example, to have heard thy discourses, to have seen thy miracles! How would every word, every look of my incarnate God, have awakened, and elevated, and transported my soul! How gladly would I have followed thee, Oh blessed Jesus, in all the meanest circumstances of thy life; though when *the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, the Son of Man had not where to lay his head*[3]. Nay, my Redeemer, may the devout Christian perhaps be ready to add, I sometimes fondly imagine, that I could have been content to follow thee to thy death too; and so far as my feeblenature could have borne, to have been the humble companion of thy sufferings. Rather than I would have abandoned thee, whom my soul so ardently loveth, surely I would have been with thee in the garden, and with thee on the cross. And shall I be with thee where thou now art! Shall I be for ever with thee in the celestial paradise, and there not only behold, but partake of the glory which thy Father hath given thee! How shall I express my admiration, and my joy!"

[3] Matt. viii. 20.

These, Christian, are thy hopes and thy expectations: and blessed hopes and glorious

expectations they are. But oh, never forget that thou owest them to the grace of the Father, and to the blood of the Son. And when thou art rising in such contemplations as these, then seriously reflect, that thou art naturally a sinful and an accursed creature; and that if Jesus had not descended from his glory to interpose between thee and the wrath of an offended God, all this bright prospect had been irrecoverably cut off; and thou wouldst not only have been for ever excluded from his blissful presence, but chained down with the Prince of Hell, the spectator and the partner of his unmeasurable torments. When thou considerest how happily the case is altered, and when thy heart is affected with the thought, address a song of the most cheerful praise *to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever.* And, let it be thy governing care, to testify the sincerity of thy gratitude by the exactest obedience to his commands, and the warmest zeal for the advancement of his interests.

Reflection 2. Does the happiness of the future state consist in being with Christ, and beholding his glory? then we may be sure that no impenitent sinner can have any part in it.

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When an audacious creature hath been all his life long despising the grace of a Redeemer, and trampling upon his *blood as an unholy thing;* can he reasonably hope to be happy in his presence, and the sight of his glory? Suppose him introduced into that august presence: how do you suppose he would be affected with it? The pomp and splendour of the appearance might indeed astonish him; but where are those springs of triumphant joy which we found in the good man? Tell us, sinners, where is that relation to Christ, and that interest in him, which could make his happiness the foundation of yours? On the contrary, would you not stand like guilty rebels before the throne of an injured sovereign? would not his dread fall upon you, and his excellency make you afraid? and would not such thoughts as these break in upon you, and torment you even in heaven itself?

"That awful, that majestic person that now shines forth with such distinguished lustre above all the inhabitants of this glorious place, is Jesus, the Son of God; my enemy, and my judge. Once he laid aside his glory for such as me, and died for sinful miserable men; and I well remember, to my

confusion I remember, how long he followed me with the offers of his grace, and invited me in the most affectionate manner to accept of pardon and happiness. But I *requited him evil for good, and hatred for his love.* Like a distracted insolent creature, I rejected him with disdain, even to the last moment in which he continued the treaty. And now, wretch that I am! I am fallen into his hands! I see the day I would never believe; and am transported into a region where he appears in all his triumph, invested with supreme authority. Oh, my soul! how will that authority be employed with respect to thee? I see his exalted glory and majesty: I hear the songs which are addressed to him; I see the homage which is paid to him by all the princes and potentates of heaven: and I cannot but view it with amazement and terror. Alas, to my everlasting confusion, it is too evident that he is able amply to avenge all the indignities which I once offered him. And I cannot but fear, that every messenger which is despatched from his throne, should bear a commission to seize upon me, and hurry me away to darkness and flames."

And now, sinners, let your own reason

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determine whether it be possible that the sight of Christ in heaven can afford you any satisfaction, when attended with such reflections and apprehensions as these; and such apprehensions you must entertain, if you live and die in your impenitence; unless you have any reason to believe that this great injured Sovereign will then accept of your extorted submission; which cannot possibly happen unless the whole constitution of the Gospel be reversed, and so all the foundation of expecting such a happiness overthrown at once. No, sinners! the scriptures expressly assure us that *when the Lord Jesus Christ shall appear in his glory*, the most insolent of his enemies shall be unable to behold him, but shall in wild confusion *call upon the rocks and the mountains to fall upon them, and cover them from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb*[4]. A most pathetic and awful text! which plainly implies that they would think it more possible to melt the rocks to compassion than to move the heart of their inexorable Judge; and that they would think the pressure of a mountain more supportable than the weight of his indignation.

[4] Rev. vi. 16.

I therefore dismiss you with this awful thought, and I entreat you seriously to attend to it, "that if you are hurried into the eternal world in your present state and temper of mind, the sight of the glory of Christ in heaven will be so far from making you happy that it will distract you with horror, and sink you in despair."

Reflection 3. If our future blessedness shall consist in the sight of Christ's glory, what care should we take to form our minds to the most exquisite relish of such a felicity!

For this end let us endeavour to cultivate and improve our love to Christ, than which nothing can conduce more to promote our joy in his exaltation and glory. Moreover if our love to Christ be sincere, it will engage us to labour to promote his interest; and surely the more service we do him in this world, the brighter discoveries of his glory may we expect in the next. Nay, we shall thereby secure his public approbation and applause, as servants of distinguished fidelity; and when we are thus honoured by him, his honour and glory will, as it were, be reflected upon us. Let it therefore constantly remain as a governing principle in our minds, that

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the more we love the Lord Jesus, and the better we serve him now, the greater will our happiness be in dwelling with him and beholding his glory. And to inflame our love, and to animate our zeal in his service, let us maintain a continual dependence on the influences of that Holy Spirit which he hath sent down from heaven, as the fruit of his intercession, to supply the want of his bodily presence, and to train up his people for this glory which he has promised. I add once more,

Reflection 4. How reasonably may the hope which hath now been set before us arm us against the temptations of life, and raise us above the fears of death.

What a faint and transitory thing does all the glory of this world appear to be when compared with that bright and permanent glory of Christ which every believer will very shortly behold; and who that expects so quickly to share in this would be anxiously solicitous about that? How mean and despicable are the pleasures of sense, when compared with those refined, rational, and immortal pleasures which stream forth from this Fountain of light and life. And, on the

other hand, how unreasonable is it to be dis- SERM. I.
composed, or at least dejected, under any of the afflictions of life, when we are so confidently assured that the clouds will shortly be dissipated by the appearance of so bright a sun. Surely, to allude to the words of St. Paul, *the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed*[5].

[5] Rom. viii. 18.

Thus may the views of this glory arm us against the allurements and the calamities of life: and I add, it may be sufficient to raise us above the fears of death. It is in itself very awful; as it removes us to an eternal distance from the entertainments of life, closes our eyes, and confines us to a grave; and, while our bodies are consuming there, consigns our souls to an unknown eternity. When we consider it only in this view, we call it the king of terrors; and start and tremble at its distant approaches. But let faith correct the errors of sense, and when we are almost overwhelmed with the timorous apprehension, let us animate our fainting courage by looking forward to that which is beyond it. If we are indeed, and not merely in profession Christians, death will introduce

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us into the presence of a glorious Redeemer; and when we consider this, have we any reason to fear it? Surely when we regard it in this view, it will appear lovely rather than dreadful, and we shall learn to say with the apostle, *I desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better*[6]. It was not the peculiar privilege of St. Paul alone; for if we are now united to him by faith, and sincerely devoted to his service, we also *shall be with him where he is.* We shall *see Jesus* upon the throne of his glory *with thousands of thousands around him, and ten thousand times ten thousand ministering unto him.* And yet in the midst of all that splendour and exaltation, our condescending Redeemer will cast a gracious eye upon each of us; and while we are humbly acknowledging that we are not worthy to perform the meanest office to the lowest of his servants, we shall hear him pronouncing our worthless names with eternal blessings upon our heads, and confessing us before the court of his Father as his favourites and his friends.

[6] Phil. i. 23.

And oh, how transporting must it be to see that blessed person stooping down from the throne of his glory, selecting you and me

out from the circle of his adorers, and perhaps addressing himself to us in words like these, "Christian, I congratulate thy arrival in this happy country, and rejoice in thine eternal salvation, which is now begun, as the purchase of that blood which I shed upon the cross. Thou hast chosen me for thy friend in a world where I was rejected and despised, and now I acknowledge thee for my friend, in a world where I triumph and reign. Thou art now come into my kingdom, and here thou shalt be for ever happy and secure. Dismiss thy fears therefore, and give a loose to thy joys; for thou art now out of the reach of all thine enemies. I saw thy painful conflict with them. I saw thee, Christian, when thou wert encountering the powers of darkness, and struggling with the corruptions of a degenerate nature. I saw thy pains, which thou wast often taking with a cold heart, to warm it with zeal and courage and devotion. I have been witness to all thy solemn dedications of thyself to me in secret; and when thou camest abroad into the world, I saw the influence which they had upon thee; how vigorous thou wast in my service, and how zealous in advancing my

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interest, in the *midst of a crooked and a perverse generation.* Then I graciously approved thee, and now I will bountifully reward thee. *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*[7]. *Father, I will that this* my servant *may be with me where I am, that he may behold the glory which thou hast given me.*"

[7] Matt. xxv. 21.

Oh, my brethren! which of us would not be contented to die this moment, to be admitted to such a felicity! Contented, did I say? which of us would not rejoice in an immediate summons, as a singular favour? Yet this honour have all the saints[8], and to this honour, if we be Christians indeed, shall we be admitted, as soon as we are *absent from the body*, for we shall even then *be present with the Lord*[9]. Surely we must be ready to say, *Why are his chariots so long in coming; why tarry the wheels of his chariots*[1]?

[8] Psa. cxlix. 9.

[9] 2 Cor. v. 8.

[1] Judg. v. 28.

And now, to conclude all, let it be our great care to give up ourselves to this Redeemer in the bonds of an everlasting covenant. While we are in this world, let it be our growing concern, by the assistances of his grace, to be more and more transformed into his image, and to subserve the purposes

of his glory. Let us pass the days of our pilgrimage here, in frequent converse with him, in continual devotedness to him, and in the longing expectation of that happy hour which will dismiss us from the labours and sorrows of this mortal state, and raise us to the fullest and brightest visions of that glory which, even in this distant and imperfect prospect, is sufficient to eclipse all the splendours of life, and to disarm all the terrors of death. Amen.

SERMON II.

OF THE CONTEMPLATION OF DEATH.

PSALM xxxix. 4.

Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am.

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THERE is something so edifying and useful, nay, indeed, so necessary in the contemplation of death, that I cannot think it reasonable to confine our discourses upon it to the solemnities of a funeral occasion. You have not now before your eyes the breathless corpse of a deceased friend, nor are the doors of the grave here thrown open to make room for a new inhabitant; yet it is highly probable that while I am speaking to you, some are struggling with their dying agonies, others lying down in the bed of dust, as it is certain that thousands are now mouldering there. It cannot therefore be unseasonable for us who may in a few days or hours be numbered amongst them, in meditation to converse with

them, or rather to lift up our eyes and our hearts to the Sovereign Arbiter of life and of death, and to say, in the words of the text, "Lord, teach us to know our end, and the measure of our days, what it is, that we may know how frail we are!"

You will easily perceive, by the tenour of the Psalm before us, that the royal author was now under the pressure of some heavy affliction, abetted and aggravated by a violent assault of temptation, which awakened his passions to an unusual transport, and threw his mind into a most painful agitation. And he tells us, in the first verse, what was the occasion of this disturbance. *It was when the wicked was before him*, i. e. as the following words explain it, when his thoughts were employed in contemplating their prosperous condition, and comparing it with his own calamitous circumstances. He acknowledges that he was at first much discomposed, *but he said*, i. e. he firmly resolved upon it, *that he would take heed to his ways*, lest he should be perverted by their evil example, or led into any irregular methods for his own preservation; and he particularly determined that he would take the greatest care that he

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might *not offend with his tongue*, and that he found it an unruly member, yet was resolved, though it were with great difficulty, to maintain his authority over it, and to "keep it as with a bridle." Accordingly, for a while, he *was dumb with silence*, i. e. he was as silent as if he had not enjoyed the use of speech, and lest the eagerness of his spirit should transport him farther than he at first intended, he *held his speech even from good*, but after all, "his sorrow was inwardly stirred," as if it had been increased rather than assuaged by such a restraint. *My heart*, says he, *was hot within me, and while I was thus musing, the fire burned*, it kindled with so much violence that it would no longer be pent in, but burst forth as it were contrary to my will, with an irresistible force, and compelled me to *speak with my tongue*. But when we come to examine what he spake, as it stands recorded in the remainder of the Psalm, we find none of those intemperate sallies of passion which might naturally have been expected from such a circumstance as he had described. All was the language of wisdom and piety, worthy the suggestion of that better Spirit by which it was dictated. No-

thing can be more rational, nothing more submissive than his address to God on this solemn occasion, *Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know*, or consider, *how frail I am.* "Teach me to weigh things in an equal balance, and so to reflect on the period of life, which is continually approaching, as to see how little there is in any of its transient scenes worthy of the anxiety of a rational creature that knows thee and itself. Neither will the prosperity in which they are so insolent and vain, nor the calamities that press me almost to the dust, impeach the honours of thy government, or destroy the tranquillity of my mind when thy grace hath taught me this important lesson."

In treating on these words, I will,

I. Endeavour more particularly to explain the import of them.

II. Show the justice of this petition of the psalmist, and how reasonable it is that we should join in it.

III. Conclude with some more particular application.

I. I am to give you a more particular ex-

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plication of the petition contained in the words of the text, or to show what David intended in praying that God would *teach him to know his end, and the measure of his days.*

Now, here it will be natural to inquire, what we are to understand by *the measure of his days;* and what by the knowledge of it, which he appears so earnestly to desire. And I apprehend that the meaning of both may be plainly expressed in a few words.

1. We may consider what is intended by *the measure of his days*, which David prays that he might be made to know.

Now, whatever the sound of the words might suggest, we are by no means to imagine that he prays for an express revelation of the precise term of his continuance in life, and the year, or day of his removal out of it: for though it be true that *our days are determined, and the number of our months is with God, who has appointed a bound which we cannot pass*[1]; yet these are amongst the secret things which belong to him. David had no warrant to expect a discovery of this; and the inconvenient consequences connected with such a knowledge would have rendered it

[1] Job xiv. 5.

both imprudent and impious to have requested it. Another sense must therefore be sought, if we would do justice to the great Author, and the greater Spirit by which it was inspired: and another sense will easily present itself. When he prays that God would *teach him the measure of his days*, he means, that he might be instructed in the brevity of human life in general, and that he might apply the truth to himself in particular, and remember, as he expresses it in the following words, that *his own days were as a hand's breadth, and his age as nothing before God*[2]. And from hence we see,

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[2] verse 5.

2. What kind of knowledge of this he desired. It is plain it was not merely a speculative notion of the truth of this proposition, "Human life is short." Moses had already recorded it, that *the days of our life are threescore years and ten*[3]; and David's own observation had certainly instructed him, as we before observed, that his were *but as a hand's breadth*[4]. He, therefore, undoubtedly meant to make it his request to the throne of Grace, that he might be taught seriously to reflect on what he already knew; and, in consequence of this reflection, to live like a dying creature, to form his temper and conduct

[3] Ps.xc.10.

[4] Ps.xxxix. 5.

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with a continual regard to his approaching change, and particularly to moderate his concern for those things which at present lay so heavy on his mind. This then, on the whole, was David's petition, "That God would teach him seriously and practically to consider the brevity and uncertainty of human life, and particularly of his own."

II. I will now proceed to show you the justice of such a petition, and the reason there is that we should every one of us concur in it.

Now to evince this, I shall insist only on two topics of argument. A serious consideration of the shortness and uncertainty of life is an important branch of true wisdom, and we are naturally apt to forget and disregard it. The former of these will prove that it is reasonable to desire it: the latter that it is necessary to pray for it. I shall copiously insist on the one, and more briefly touch on the other, which evidently follows by a most plain and easy consequence.

1. A serious consideration of the brevity and uncertainty of life, and the sure and speedy approach of death, is an important branch of true wisdom.

One of the ancients expressed this in a lively manner, when he described moral philosophy by saying, it was the meditation of death. And a much greater person very strongly implied it when he said, *Oh that they were wise: that they understood this, even that they would consider their latter end*[5]. The justice of these expressions will plainly appear, if we consider how highly such serious reflections on this awful subject will conduce both to our present and our future happiness.

[5] Deut. xxxii. 29.

2. The consideration of death is highly conducive to the advancement of our present comfort and happiness.

This may, perhaps, at first seem a strange if not an absurd assertion; yet the truth of it will appear beyond all rational contradiction, if we can prove, as I am persuaded we shall, that it tends to regulate and correct those passions which by their undue exercise occasion the greatest disturbances in life. More particularly let me show at large that the contemplation of death moderates the eagerness of desire, chastises the insolence of joy, alleviates the burden of sorrow, and fortifies the mind against the assaults of fear.

3. The serious contemplation of death

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moderates the eagerness of desire, and thereby conduces to our present happiness.

Nothing is so desirable as to *possess our own souls*[6]; and whatever is inconsistent with tranquillity and serenity of mind is inconsistent with the happiness of a rational nature; now, though it must be granted that the transports of desire are not equally painful with those of sorrow or of rage, yet when that desire terminates in any object inferior to the supreme good, there is a train of evils attending it which a wise man would studiously avoid.

[6] Luke xxi. 19.

It is an indignity to a rational and immortal soul, which can only find its solid happiness in God and in itself, to be brought into a state of servile dependence almost on every thing around it, so that it shall be forced meanly to crouch to this and the other creature, and to ask its leave to be happy; and the very consciousness of being reduced thus low, will be grievous to a heart touched with a sense of honour and at all sensible of its native excellence. Again, this earnestness of desire after inferior objects costs us abundance of pains in the prosecution of them, which might well be spared, or at least con-

tracted, if our desires were reduced within due bounds. And then it frequently happens, that after all we miss of what we have been so vigorously pursuing; and the torments and vexation of that disappointment are always proportionate to the fondness of our wishes, and the extravagancy of our hopes. In the mean time, the uncertainty of human affairs always leaves room to fear that we may be disappointed; and those fears, even when they arise merely from an apprehended possibility, and much more when they seem probable and threatening, fill the mind with an anxiety and distress which spoil the relish of present enjoyment.

From all these particulars, it appears that the exorbitancy of desire occasions a great deal of trouble in human life; it remains, therefore, in order to complete this argument, that I show that the consideration of death has a tendency to moderate it, correct it; and thereby it will appear that it promotes our present comfort and happiness.

Now it is evident, that the contemplation of death moderates the eagerness of our desires, by diminishing the value of those objects which we are most apt to be enchanted with;

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and by showing that they are at least equally transient and uncertain with human life, on which they depend. This is plainly a very considerable argument to dissuade us from an immoderate regard to them, and as such, it is urged by the apostle[7], *Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world, for the fashion of the world passeth away.*

[7] 1 John ii. 17.

The consideration of the frailty of human life naturally teaches us to argue thus: "Is it for a mortal creature who is continually hastening to his long home, to be eagerly solicitous about the amusements or accommodations of his passage? What is all the splendour and magnificence of a court? what are all the peculiar treasures and delights of kings and of princes, when all their *pomp must so soon be brought down to their grave, and the sound of their vials: when the worm shall be spread under them, and the worm shall cover them*[8]? How do all the ensigns of majesty fade and tarnish, when I consider, that in a few days these gods who wear them *shall die like men, and fall like one of the* preceding *princes*[9]; that they must quickly be stripped of their robes, and clothed with corruption, while their shining palaces, and their spacious

[8] Isa. xiv. 11.

[9] Ps. lxxxii. 6.

apartments, are exchanged for the confinement of a coffin, and the darkness of a grave! And if these are so vain, what shall I think of the little ornaments and amusements of life which I could propose, so much inferior in grandeur, but equally transitory and precarious! SERM. II.

"Why should I be so desirous of applause and reputation, when I must so soon enter on the land of silence and forgetfulness? I am to leave my name upon the tongues of creatures, mortal like myself, and it can be but a little while ere it shall die with them; or, should it be perpetuated to future generations, the feeble echo will not penetrate the tomb, nor shall I, while it continues, be any more sensible of it than of the harmony of music played over my grave.

"Am I extremely fond of riches, and ready to lay out my time and my strength in the pursuit of them? Come, oh my soul! and let me seriously inquire what they can do for a dying creature? They now may procure me some of the least considerable enjoyments of life; but can they, by any means, *redeem me from death, or give unto God a ransom for me*[1]? Is gold that sovereign cordial which will revive and support

[1] Ps. xlix. 7.

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my soul, when I am sinking in the agonies of dissolving nature? or will it attend me into a new world, and purchase me a habitation and an inheritance there? Alas! my poor breathless corpse will know nothing of the ornaments of its coffin, or the fineness of its shroud, or the cavalcade of its funeral, were it ever so magnificent. And yet these are the last offices my riches will be able to do for me; unless, perhaps, it be to erect a monument of my frailty and their own vanity; and to signify to the surviving, curious, unconcerned spectator, that they left their helpless owner mouldering near such a place. Shall I then be concerned to lay in a mighty cargo of provisions for so short and so hazardous a voyage? or to secure, for a few days, the custody of treasure which must so quickly be transferred to other hands?

"And as for the gratifications of appetite, shall I be eagerly set on pleasing my palate and fulfilling the other desires of mere animal nature; when I know that my mouth shall soon be filled with dust, and that all the vessels of digestion, and organs of sensation, must be thrown for a prey to devouring worms?

"The society and converse of my friends

is indeed dear and delightful: but shall all my happiness be bound up in them when I know the separation is so near? when I know that though the most agreeable circle of them were fondly surrounding my dying bed, and the dearest of them all folding me in the tenderest embraces, we must part there; and I must pass alone through the gloomy solitary valley of the grave? There, in those awful moments, if the memory of the most beloved of them all be retained, it will be only to add a more exquisitely painful sense of the violence which tears us unwillingly from each other.

" Once more—Shall I make the pursuit of knowledge my ultimate end, when, as I know that the faculties of the human mind are weak, and the subjects of its inquiries infinite, so am I certain that I have but a little while allotted for such a chase? If the vigour of my reason continues to the last, death will cut me off in the midst of my pursuits, and, like many greater and better men than myself, I shall leave my schemes unfinished behind me; or may be removed just as I am going to put them in execution. And then *my purposes will be broken off*, and all the brightest and

SERM. II. most elaborate of *my thoughts must perish* in that very day. This brain, which is now inscribed with such a variety of curious characters, furnished with so many precious materials which it has been the long labour of succeeding years to collect and dispose in the exactest order, shall then, in a few hours, be reduced to a confused jelly; and all the pains I have bestowed upon it will not so much as make it a more delicious morsel for the worms which shall devour it. And as for my soul, it must enter on a very different world, where I shall be surrounded with other kind of objects. There I may perhaps be put to begin again from the first rudiments of knowledge; at least, I am sure that many of those inquiries which have been most laborious and perplexing to me, will then be entirely useless."

Thus, my brethren! you see how many of the most beautiful objects of our wishes grow pale, and faint at the approach of this universal destroyer: how all their glories are darkened by the shadows of the grave, in which they are shortly to terminate. For there appears to be this double vanity in them, they cannot ward off the assaults of

death, nor secure our happiness in the state that lies beyond it; and on these accounts we may reasonably conclude that, the more we think of that awful change, the more will our desires after these things be moderated. I add, SERM. II.

2. The remembrance and contemplation of death has a tendency to correct the insolence of joy, and thereby to advance the happiness of life.

We are naturally so vain and so weak, that we hardly know how to bear prosperity and success, without being transported into some indecencies by it. The warmth of the climate, and the luxuriancy of the soil, is ready to breed diseases; and we are in great danger of being overset by these favourable gales, for want of a sufficient ballast. Sometimes we consider prosperity and success as an intimation at least of some superior excellence in us, and this inspires us with an air of haughtiness, which pains the mind whilst it unnaturally distends it, and makes us disagreeable to all around us; who will probably hate our insolence, even more than they will envy our prosperity where it most interferes with their own: and they may perhaps

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take such methods to check it as will create a world of needless uneasiness. And, if Providence see fit to change our condition (which both the mutability of human affairs, and the irregularity of our own tempers, may give us too much reason to expect), the same weakness of soul which transported us in our prosperity will render us equally abject in trouble and distress. It is necessary, therefore, in order to our comfortable passage through life, that such transports should be moderated; and the contemplation of death has the most happy efficacy for this purpose.

This will evidently appear from what I was saying under the former head. For the same considerations, which convince us that the good things of life are not too earnestly to be desired at a distance, will also prove that we should not be greatly elevated in the actual possession of them.

Wilt thou know, O vain man! whosoever thou art that exultest in the abundance of these things, wilt thou know that thy triumph is short, and thy joy but for a moment; for it is but a little, a very little while, and all thy boasted enjoyments shall be lost in the grave? Retire to the repositories of the dead,

and there let thy senses teach thee what reason and religion are representing in vain. Survey those ruins of human nature, and be curious in observing how it is that the dust of the fair and the wise, the powerful and the rich, can be distinguished from that of the deformed and the ignorant, the weak and the poor: and then tell us whether such a melancholy scene be not sufficient to stain the pride of human glory, to correct our insolence, to discountenance our scorn, and in a word to awe the soul into silence and solemnity. These poor remains which thou now seest were once animated bodies like thine; and no doubt like thee they had once their gay, their prosperous, and perhaps their triumphant days. But do not those sparkles languish in their eyes, and are not those smiles worn off from their lips? or rather, where are the eyes that sparkled, and the lips that smiled, that they have left the skulls thus naked and ghastly? While they are themselves silent, let the inscriptions on their monuments teach thee that, as they were once like thee, so thou shalt quickly be numbered amongst them. And now return to thy sports and thy pride; suffer thyself for a few moments to be transported with these vain

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transient distinctions; and despise those that are destitute of them. But take heed that this gloomy remembrance doth not break in upon thee, overcast thy triumphs, and damp thy joy; or rather, take heed that death itself does not surprise thee, and write those instructions in thine own dust which thine insolent heart would not learn from theirs.

So evidently important and efficacious is the thought which I now propose to the purpose for which it is here mentioned, that Philip of Macedon, in the career of victory, appointed a servant every morning to admonish him of it, by telling him that he was a mortal man. The apostle reminds us that *time is short*, that we might learn *to rejoice as if we rejoiced not*[2]. And once more, when the rich man in the Gospel is represented as triumphing in the abundance of his possessions, and saying to his soul, *thou hast goods laid up for many years, eat, drink, and be merry*, God immediately strikes him into silence and astonishment by the mention of approaching death. *God said unto him, thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee*[3].

[2] 1 Cor. vii. 30.

[3] Luke, xii. 20.

3. The contemplation of death has a far-

ther tendency to promote the happiness of the present life, as it may alleviate the burthen of our sorrows. SERM. II.

In persons of strong passions the transports of sorrow are often very violent, insomuch that the apostle says, *the sorrow of this world worketh death*[4]. For the present it suspends our relish for all remaining comforts, and in its remoter consequences it may impair our health, and thereby not only imbitter, but shorten our days. For *heaviness in the heart of man maketh it droop, and a broken spirit drieth the bones*[5]. [4] 2 Cor. vii. 10. [5] Prov. xii. 25. xvii. 22.

Now the consideration of death must have the same efficacy to alleviate our sorrow as to correct our joy and moderate our desire, by convincing us of the vanity of human affairs when considered only in reference to this present state. Our sorrow arises from the disappointment of our expectations of future good, the apprehension of some future, or the assault of some present evil. As to the former of these, the meditation which I now recommend will teach us that those comforts and enjoyments whose absence we lament are of a fading and transitory nature; death would soon have spoiled us of them,

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had the present disappointment been prevented; so that all our calamity amounts to no more than this, that we have missed of the pleasure of a few days. And as for positive evils, such as sickness and pain of body, or the insolence of our enemies, or the unkindness of our friends on the one hand, or their afflictions on the other, I acknowledge that no philosophical considerations whatsoever can entirely destroy our sense of them. But the meditation I am now recommending will suggest a very valuable support under them. Are we such weak and irresolute creatures that we cannot sustain the uneasiness of a few moments? Why, it is no more; for death is before us; and if we make due preparations for that, we may there see the period of all our sorrows. The dust of the grave will dry up our tears; for as Job well expresses it, *there the wicked cease from trou-*

[6] Job iii. 17.

bling, and there the weary are at rest[6]. "It is true," says Dr. Barrow, "the winter of death will wither the lily and the rose, but it will also kill the thistle and the nettle*." Though

[7] Gen. xlvii. 9.

our *days are evil, they are but few*[7]; and therefore we have little reason to murmur or

* Barrow's Works, vol. iii. p. 127.

repine. This is likewise the inference of the apostle in the forecited place, *Time is short; it therefore remains that those that weep be as though they wept not*[8].

[8] 1 Cor. vii. 30.

4. The consideration of death has a tendency to support the mind from sinking under its fears, and thereby to promote the true happiness of life.

Fear hath an apparent tendency to weaken the judgment, and betray the succours of reason. It not only anticipates future evils, and thereby destroys our present comforts, but, when it prevails in an immoderate degree, it breaks the spirit, and renders us less fit to encounter calamity. So that whatever can free us from the slavery of fear must, together with that liberty, secure our happiness in a proportionable measure.

Now what we have just been observing under the last head may be sufficient to prove the efficacy, or at least the probable tendency, of the contemplation of death for this purpose. For we fear distant evils only in proportion to that degree in which we apprehend that we should sorrow for them, should they actually arrive. Now when our apprehensions of these evils are so regulated by

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such wise and holy reflections as that we learn to mourn as if we mourned not, we shall not surely be excessively terrified at their distant and uncertain prospect. We shall then know that the worst they can do is only to give us a very short uneasiness; and we shall know too that there is at least a possibility they may never arise; since, besides all the unexpected revolutions of life, death may perhaps interpose, and raise us above the reach of them.

But it may very probably be objected that death is itself the most formidable of all evils, and that, therefore, to propose the thoughts of death as a remedy against other fears is like attempting to cure some slight wound by a stab at the heart. Nevertheless the answer is obvious, that the terror which arises from the fear of death, when we have learned to judge aright of the possessions of this mortal life, must in all probability chiefly proceed from an apprehended unpreparedness for it; for when this important preparation is made, it will appear the object of desire rather than that of terror. Now I shall immediately prove to you that such contemplations will quicken us to this great work,

so that on the whole the more we think of it, the more ready for it shall we probably be; and the more ready we are for it, the less shall we fear it; and the less we fear death, the more comfortably and the more wisely shall we both enjoy and improve life. But this naturally leads me to add that, as the contemplation of death thus tends to secure and promote the happiness of the present state, by regulating those passions which would give us anxiety, so,

2. It is also highly subservient to our future and our eternal felicity; which is a farther reason for adopting the prayer of the Psalmist in the text.

Now here I take it for granted as the foundation of my argument, that both by the constitution of God and in the nature of things holiness and happiness are inseparably connected; and that the degrees of our future happiness will be proportionable to the progress we now make in religion. I shall therefore fully prove the point before us, if I can show that the consideration of death has a tendency to awaken the carnal and unregenerate sinner to a serious concern about his eternal salvation, and to quicken the sin-

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cere Christian to vigour and diligence in working it out. But you will remember that I intend not to assert any necessary efficacy in the thought itself, but would only prove that it is so rational and proper to the purpose, as that the cooperation of the regenerating and sanctifying Spirit may be probably expected; for I hope it will always be remembered by us, that the success of all the means that can be used to form or to cherish religion in the soul depends on that sacred agent; so that on Him our dependance must rest, and to Him our praises must be ascribed. After this precaution, give me leave to show,

1. That the consideration of death has an admirable tendency to awaken the unconverted sinner to some serious concern about his eternal salvation.

And this it may in part do by convincing him of the necessity of attending to it, and showing him the vanity of those things which would prevent a friendship between God and his soul. I suppose a mind informed in the Gospel doctrine, and convinced of its truth. Now, methinks, it should be exceeding natural for such a person to reflect: "Am I indeed a

dying creature, and shall I make no preparation for so awful a change? Hath God condescended to set on foot a treaty with me relating to my eternal state, and shall I neglect it? Where will this end? When the king of terrors makes his advances towards me, can I prevail against him by the strength of resistance, by the wisdom of contrivance, by the importunity of entreaties, by the preciousness of an offered ransom? Where are the vigorous, the great, the wise, the eloquent, the rich? Are they not lying in undistinguished dust? I cannot, with all the artifice of self-flattery, delude myself into so vain a hope as that I shall have a perpetual abode here. And can I bear the thought of being violently torn away from all my possessions, from all my joys, and from all my hopes? of going, with all my follies and all my crimes upon my head, into a world where I have no portion, unless in *a lake that burneth with fire and brimstone*[9]; and no friend, but on the contrary must meet the only Being that could prove a friend to me under the character of an almighty, irreconcilable enemy? And shall I give up God and a glorious immortality, and face all the horrors of

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[9] Rev. xx. 10.

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eternal damnation for amusements at least as precarious as my breath, for trifles which unrelenting death will in a few moments tear from my embraces? Is there yet a door of hope opened, is there yet a peradventure that all this ruin may be prevented? Haste, O my soul, to know and to pursue the appointed method of escape, and to receive and entertain him who is *the resurrection and the life*[1], even *Jesus who delivereth from the wrath to come*[2]."

[1] John xi. 25.

[2] 1 Thess. i. 10.

And I might add here, that when the sinner is thus awakened, the remembrance of death will also engage him to an immediate dispatch. "Shall I delay this important work, when death may surprise me this year, this day, or perhaps this hour, and bury me and all my hopes low in everlasting despair? Let those who have *made a covenant with the grave, and a league with death*[3], that it shall not invade them before they are aware, let them, if such there be, presume to trifle in this great concern; but to me it might be eternal ruin. It is too evident I *have here no continuing city*, and it must be distraction any longer to defer the *seeking of one to come*[4]. But farther,

[3] Is. xxviii. 15.

[4] Heb. xiii. 14.

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2. The consideration of death has an apparent tendency to quicken the Christian to greater diligence in working out his salvation.

Notwithstanding all the arguments to engage us to this, which are drawn from the present pleasure and future advantages attending it, we are such weak and inconsiderate creatures that we suffer a thousand vain amusements to break in upon us, to divert our attention, and to abate our zeal. But surely were death more in our thoughts, it would put more life and vigour into our actions. Methinks it is very natural for a Christian, when he hath been meditating on death, to fall into such reflections as these: "I am under infinite and unknown obligations to the blessed God, and my dear Redeemer; and the most faithful and ardent services of all my time and all my eternity will be little enough to express my gratitude. I have a great deal of work to do for God, which this present life is the only season of dispatching. In my own soul how many weak graces are to be strengthened and confirmed! How many strong corruptions to be mortified and subdued! In the world about

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me, how many carnal sinners to be warned and awakened! How many decaying Christians to be admonished and restored! How many disconsolate saints to be comforted and supported! Nor have I a hundred or a thousand years allotted me for these various offices of duty and of love. Far from that, it is but yet a few days, and I shall be numbered amongst the dead. This tongue that should have spoken for him will be silent in the dust, and these limbs which should have been acting for him will be mouldering in the grave. And shall I neglect this only season? Shall the light of the day be spent in vain, when the shadows of the evening are coming on so fast? No, let me rather resolve, with my Redeemer, that I will *work the work of him that hath sent me while it is day, because the night cometh wherein no man can work*[5]; that *whatever my hand findeth to do, I will do it with all my might*; because *there is no device, nor knowledge, nor working in the grave*, whither I am going[6]. I know not the hour when my Lord cometh[7], I will therefore endeavour to be always ready, that I may not be surprised in an act of sin or an act of vanity; but may be found so doing as the

[5] John ix. 4.

[6] Eccles. ix. 10.

[7] Matthew xxiv. 42.

duty of my place requires; obedient to his sacred commands, and always subserving the purposes of his glory." SERM. II.

Again, as the contemplation of our great approaching change may well awaken us to the improvement of our time and the discharge of our duty, so it will also animate our souls against those trials to which Providence may call us. It will remind us that the confiscation of our goods, the confinement or even the torture of our bodies, are *light afflictions, because they are but for a moment*[8]. " Nay," will the contemplative Christian naturally say, " if I am called to martyrdom itself, it is but the anticipation of a death which I always expected, and which, in the course of nature, would quickly have overtaken me. I am not required to sacrifice an immortality in the cause of God, but only to exchange a few moments; and indeed I know not how few. Perhaps, should I basely purchase my life at the expense of truth, and by the shipwreck of conscience, righteous vengeance might immediately pursue me, and bring me *down to the dust of death* by a speedier stroke than my enemies intend; nay, to the flames of hell, by an almighty

[8] 2 Cor. iv. 17.

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Power, infinitely beyond that which they, in their most triumphant wickedness, can exert.

I persuade myself that, when all these particulars are weighed in a serious and impartial manner, it must be acknowledged that the contemplation of death, gloomy and dreadful as its aspect may at first appear, is on the whole greatly for our advantage, both with regard to our present and our future happiness. This is one considerable reason to engage us to join with David in the text; and to pray that God would *teach us to know our end, and the measure of our days, what it is.* But the reasonableness and necessity of the petition will farther appear if we consider,

2. How apt we are to disregard and neglect it, notwithstanding all our obligations to attend to it.

[9] Eccles. ix. 7.

The living know that they must die[9], and there is no doubt but we all firmly believe it, as in words we readily acknowledge it; but alas, how little do we lay it to heart! Instead of considering it, and acting upon it, we really live as if we were privileged persons, and were designed for an eternal abode here. We are conscious to ourselves that this is too much our own character, and if we look

abroad into the world, we find it a kind of epidemical madness. The generality of mankind spend their lives in a laborious drudgery for the world. They are full of projects and contrivances about it, and when death comes, they are all in a hurry and consternation; and seem to be as much surprised at it as if they were the first of the species that had been assaulted by it, and in the whole course of life had never once heard that it was the end *appointed for all flesh*. Now since this is evidently the character of the greater part of mortals, so that it appears in fact that neither the admonitions of the word nor the providence of God are sufficient to awaken them, though *a thousand fall at their side, and ten thousand at their right hand*[1], we may easily conclude that nothing less than an almighty power can effectually impress it on the heart. So that if the contemplation of death be a branch of true wisdom, as I have so largely proved that it is, nothing can be more reasonable than that we, lacking it so much, should ask it of God[2], whose gracious influence on the mind can recall it from all its darling vanities, can add a solemnity and a pleasure too to thoughts which we naturally

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[1] Ps. xci.

[2] Jam. i. 5.

SERM. II. slight or abhor; and on the whole can so *teach us to know our end, and to number our days*, as to engage us in good earnest *to apply our hearts to all* necessary preparation for it[3].

[3] Ps. xc. 12.

Having thus largely handled the doctrinal part, a few words may conclude.

III. By way of application.

Now I would address these things both to those who are still in an unconverted state, and to those who by divine grace have been reclaimed from it.

1. Let me address myself to unconverted sinners, and entreat them seriously to enter on the consideration which I have been so largely recommending.

Indeed, my friends! when I seriously reflect on the dreadful condition in which you continually are, when I view you as hanging over a lake of *unquenchable burnings* by so slender a thread as this mortal life, which may be snapped asunder, even while I am speaking to you; it awakens in my mind a mixture of compassion and horror. I sometimes wonder that you are not overwhelmed, and almost distracted with a sense

of your danger. I wonder that the thoughts of death and damnation do not haunt and torment you wherever you are, and whatever you do, so as to unfit you even for the common business of life, as well as for all its enjoyments. And yet, stupid and infatuated as you are, you can eat and drink, and sleep, and travel, and trade; nay, you can sport and play as securely as if all were safe, and neither death nor hell were so much as possible dangers. To see you dying of some mortal distemper, and yet imagining yourselves in perfect health, were, to a man of a humane and friendly temper, a sight of little moment, of little grief, compared with the circumstances in which you are. And shall we calmly stand by and suffer you to *sleep on and take your rest;* and to secure your favour, betray your souls by soothing you in these fatal delusions? We dare not, we cannot do it.

Sinners! it is *high time to awake.* I do now give you this public and solemn warning in the presence of God and of this assembly, that as surely as you are now living and appearing amongst us, so surely must every one of you, ere long, be stretched out a cold

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breathless corpse; removed from the sight and converse of men, and mouldering away in a silent grave. And I do farther remind you that, when *the body shall return to dust as it was, the spirit shall return to God who gave it.* Now I would solemnly charge it upon you, that you seriously consider the matter; for it is principally to your forgetfulness of this that we owe the want of success in our other messages.

I know these are unwelcome tidings, and that while I deliver them, my voice is but like the raven's note. You would forget death: and I wonder not at it, considering your present circumstances; for it is indeed to you a dreadful remembrance. Its visage is, at best, pale and ghastly; and its native horrors are infinitely increased by the flames of hell which are flashing after it. Yes, sinner! when thou art panting and struggling in thine expiring agonies, when thine eyes are set, and thy heart-strings are bursting in sunder, all these things *are but the beginning of sorrows;* for thou must immediately pass from the milder pains of the first, to the infinitely more insupportable agonies of the second death.

Why then do I torment thee before the

time, and anticipate these awful terrors? Why do I interrupt these pleasing dreams, in which thou mayest at least lose the remembrance and apprehension of them. Alas! God is my witness, that I have no unkind design in the representation which I have now been making. Far from that; it proceeds from the tenderest compassion to thy miserable condition, and an earnest desire of being instrumental in thy deliverance. Poor creature! thy thoughtless unconcernedness can be no more security to thee against the assault of this terrible enemy, than shutting thine eyes would be a defence against a furious lion that came roaring to devour thee. If thou wilt not now think of it, thou must shortly feel it; and all the fruit of thy present negligence will be, that the surprise will unspeakably increase the terror. On the other side, the serious consideration of it might be a means of disarming it of its sting, and of forming the soul by happy degrees to a familiar and pleasing acquaintance with it. Jesus, by dying, conquered death; and thou, by a believing application to him, mayest be a sure partner in his victory. If thou art clothed in his righteousness, and *washed in*

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his blood, thou mayest consider his gracious voice as calling thee to the grave, his almighty hand as leading you through it to regions of glory; and in this view, to die will appear a privilege rather than a calamity; and the prospects of that *end appointed for all the living*, instead of blasting, as it now does, the sweetest of thine enjoyments, will sweeten the bitterest of thy present afflictions.

2. Let me conclude with addressing myself to sincere Christians, and with recommending to them this important contemplation.

And here methinks I should have a very easy task; for I am exhorting you Christians not only to a wholesome, but to a very agreeable exercise. Art thou, oh believer! unwilling to think of death? methinks the remembrance of it should be thy daily refuge, and thy daily joy. For terrible as it is to him who goes on still in his trespasses, to thee it must have an angel's face. Dost thou not know that it is a friendly messenger sent to thee from heaven to tell thee that an habitation there is ready to receive thee? that the days of thy warfare are fully accomplished, so that the crown of victory is immediately to be set on thine head; and the

triumphant palm to be borne? Dost thou not know, oh Christian! that when conquered, it was also reconciled by a Redeemer, and added to the treasures and possessions of his people. It is now become a gentle slumber, in which thou shalt lose thy fatigues and thy cares, thy sorrows and thy fears; and from which thou shalt awaken to transporting joy and incorruptible glory. How canst thou forget so kind a friend, from whom thou hast such grand and such certain expectations? How canst thou forget that important day which shall be the period of calamity and of sin, and the commencement of complete holiness, of eternal felicity?

My beloved! let us not forget it, but let the contemplation of it be most familiar to our mind; especially in those circumstances which may most naturally suggest it, or most necessarily require it. When we are too eagerly engaged in the prosecution of any worldly advantage, or transported with too tender an affection towards any created enjoyment, let us view them in this glass, and cool such intemperate heats, by looking forward to the end of all these things, which is

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at hand. When our hearts are sinking in the fears of any future evil, or melting with sorrow under any present calamity, let us rally our fainting spirits, by remembering that all our fears and our sorrows will soon terminate in everlasting confidence and joy; and let us improve every present alarm as an additional argument to desire and pursue that blissful state. And lastly, in an hour of spiritual sloth or of strong temptation, let us quicken and fortify our minds by reflecting on our approaching dissolution, that we may always think, and speak, and act, like dying, yet immortal creatures. And let the workings of Providence around us in the deaths and funerals of others, and the workings of mortality within us in frequent pains and distempers, be improved as additional instructions to *teach us to know our end and the measure of our days what it is.*

And to conclude, as we are naturally apt to forget these things, and are of ourselves such impotent creatures, that, without the assistances of the Divine Spirit, we know not how to act or to think aright, let it be our daily business at the throne of grace, to

apply to *the ever blessed God, the Father of our spirits*, and the sovereign arbiter of life and of death; beseeching him, that he would suggest such meditations to us, and enable us to profit by them; that so we may not rest in empty speculations on so great and so important a subject, but may be taught in such a manner *to number our days, as that we may*, with resolution and success, *apply our hearts* to true *wisdom*. Amen.

SERMON III.

OF WALKING BEFORE THE LORD IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING.

PSALM cxvi. 9.

I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

SERM. III. THIS admirable psalm was certainly composed by David, when God had delivered him from some dreadful affliction; which seemed to threaten very fatal consequences. What the particular calamity was, it is impossible certainly to say; but no conjecture seems more just than that which supposes it to have been some dangerous illness, from which he was now recovered; though he had passed through scenes of uncommon anguish and distress in it. Verse 2, *The sorrows of death*, says he, *compassed me about, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me;* i. e. as it seems from the usual import of the word which we translate hell, I was seized with such agonies as seemed like to bring me to

the grave. But when there was but a step between him and death, a watchful and Almighty Providence interposed, and turned his groans into songs of praise; and inspired his heart with the warmest resolutions of an inviolable adherence to his God and his duty in all the remainder of life. *Thou hast delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.*

My Christian friends! when we read this psalm, we have not only reason to applaud it as a fine poetical composition, full of vivacity, and full of beauty; but surely, we must each of us consider it as in some measure applicable to ourselves, and as expressive of what at least ought to be, and I hope in some degree is, the working of our own hearts. We have not passed through so many years in life with an entire freedom from afflictions and dangers. Surely there are numerous instances in which the hand of God has threatened us, and touched us. It is probable that every one of us may recollect solemn and distressful moments, in which we could say that *the sorrows of death compassed us about, and the pains of hell*

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seemed perhaps, ready to *take hold upon us.* In such a place may one of us say, I was laid upon a bed of sickness; and I thought I should have arisen no more: my friends had the same apprehensions, and wept over me as one over whose grave they were shortly to weep. On such a road, may another of us say, and on such a particular spot of ground, God suffered eminent danger to come within my view; that I might be more deeply sensible of his interposing hand and preserving care. I said, *my foot slipped*, and if I was master of any rational thought at all, it was only this, to commend a departing spirit into thine hand, *and thy mercy, oh Lord! held me up:* and some little circumstance beyond my contrivance, perhaps too, beneath my previous notice, rendered those accidents harmless which had otherwise been most fatal. The particular occasions may be various, and undoubtedly they are so; but I persuade myself there is not one amongst us who may not say, with regard to one event and another, as the Psalmist doth; *Thou hast delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling:* may there not be one who shall not add with the same

pious temper, *I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living!* For your farther assistance in forming and executing such a resolution, give me leave,

I. To open the import of it, or to show what it is to *walk before the Lord.*

II. To consider those engagements to it which the text seems to suggest.

The whole discourse will be so practical, and the concluding part of it so close an application, that I will not trespass on your time by insisting on the reflections which might naturally be deduced from it.

I. I am to open the import of this pious resolution of David's, or to show you what it is to *walk before the Lord.*

Here it is easy to observe, that in the word of God a course of action is represented by a way, and particular acts by steps; and accordingly going on in a continued series of good or bad actions is represented by walking either in a good or evil way. Thus in scripture we often read of *walking uprightly*, of *walking in craftiness*, of *walking in love*, and *walking in pride*[1], as the character of an honest or a deceitful, a charitable or a haughty

[1] Psa. xv. 2. Prov. ii. 7. 2 Cor. iv. 2. Rom. xiv. 15. Dan. iv. 37.

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person. In like manner, *walking before the Lord* is acting or behaving statedly as in his sight. There is a sense in which this is true of all mankind, that they *walk before the Lord*, i. e. they are in his sight, under his view; for *all the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, so that he pondereth all his* [2] *paths*[2]. *There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity can hide* [3] *themselves*[3], or in which they can conceal even the sentiments of their hearts from Him who filleth both heaven and earth with his [4] presence[4]. But wicked men, though they are really before him, yet they act as if they were under an impenetrable covert, or God were removed at the greatest distance from them. It is their practical language to say unto God, *Depart from us, for what can the* [5] *Almighty do for us*[5]*? How doth God know*, and *is there knowledge in the Most High? The Lord seeth not, neither doth the God of* [6] *Jacob regard it*[6]. But on the contrary the good man, with Hagar, *looks after Him that* [7] *seeth him*[7], with Moses, *he seeth Him that* [8] *is invisible*[8], and with David, *he setteth the Lord always before him*[9], i. e. he endeavours to manage the whole of his behaviour as one

[2] Prov. v. 21.

[3] Job xxxiv. 22.

[4] Jer. xxiii. 24.

[5] Job xxii. 17.

[6] Psa. xciv. 7.

[7] Gen. xvi. 13.

[8] Heb. xi. 27.

[9] Psa xvi. 8.

who knows and considers that he is always in the Divine presence.

As the blessed God is a being of the highest perfection, excellence, and glory, to act always in a manner suitable to the thoughts and sense of his presence would imply the exactest course of unerring piety and universal holiness. In this view God gave the charge to his people of old as a comprehensive summary of universal duty. For he says to Abraham, *Walk thou before me, and be thou perfect*[1]; and to Solomon, *Take heed to all thy ways, to walk before me*[2]. And the scripture uses the like phrase to express the character of those who in the main course of their lives were remarkable for a steady adherence to the ways of wisdom and goodness; *they walked with God*, or walked before him, though amongst them all there was not *a good man upon earth, who did good, and sinned not*. In this sense it is applied to Enoch, Noah, Abraham, David, and many other Old Testament saints[3], and is made the general definition of those who were truly pious and acceptable to God: *thou keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants who walk before thee with all their heart*[4].

[1] Gen. xvii. 1.
[2] 1 Kings ii. 4.
[3] Gen. v. 22. vi. 9. 1 Kings ix. 4.
[4] 1 Kings viii. 23.

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This, then, is the general explication: to walk before God implies such a persuasion and such a consideration of the Divine attributes and perfections as will engage us to behave as in the presence of God, and in a manner correspondent to those perfections, and agreeable to his will.

But it may be proper to descend to some of those particulars which are comprehended in this general account of the matter, and to show that it expresses a life of humble reverence, of quiet submission, of cheerful dependance, of tender gratitude, of vigorous zeal, and of faithful obedience.

1. To walk before the Lord undoubtedly expresses a life of awful reverence.

If we believe there is a God, we must believe and confess him to be the greatest and the most venerable of beings, highly exalted above all adoration and praise, even that which is presented by the most excellent of his creatures. Scripture describes the most illustrious angels as standing before him in the postures of most humble worshippers, and surely it is a most just representation; for the glories of those morning stars, bright as they are, must fade and die before the beams of

this refulgent sun. What then *is man who is a worm, and the son of man, who is but a worm*[5]? To impress our souls with a becoming reverential awe of God, he is painted out in Isaiah as *filling the whole circle of the heavens as his seat*[6]; as *measuring the water in the hollow of his hand*; as *meting out the heavens with a span, and weighing the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance.* And we, the inhabitants of it, so fondly conceited of our own dignity and importance, *are but as grasshoppers before him*, mean and inconsiderable as those puny insects which we trample under our feet, without observing them. And this the gracious soul doth not only believe and confess, but deeply and inwardly feel. Lord! doth it often say, it is so, whatever rank I hold amongst my fellow worms, when compared with thee, my lustre is darkness, my wisdom is folly, my power is weakness, and my holiness pollution. And this great, this awful, tremendous Being is here present with me. Oh, how should I be affected with his presence! how should I shrink into nothing before the Eternal All! Thus does the holy soul, when in the lively views of the Divine Being, loathe and abhor itself, and lie down

[5] Job xxv. 6.

[6] Isa. xl. 22, &c.

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in dust and ashes; and thus careful is it in the whole of its deportment to walk humbly with its God, which is one thing most evidently implied in walking before him.

2. To walk before God doth likewise express a life of humble submission to the disposals of his providence.

Surely, when we consider what was hinted under the former head, nothing can be more natural than the connexion between these two thoughts, I am before God, and I will submit to him. This all perfect and all glorious Being hath an unlimited empire over universal nature. He doth what he pleaseth amongst the armies of heaven, as well as the inhabitants of earth; and his purposes, being always wise and holy, are always resolute and unchangeable. His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure. And the soul that walks before the Lord can say, Let him do it all without any exception. Murmur not, O my soul, that thou art not to carve and choose for thyself, but rather rejoice that infinite wisdom and infinite goodness will condescend to take the care of thine affairs, and to choose thine inheritance and thy circumstances for thee. Oh, Lord, here I am,

do with me as seemeth good in thy sight. Lead me whithersoever thou wilt, and I will cheerfully follow; pronounce what thou pleasest concerning me, and I will, by thy grace, say, *Good is the word of the Lord which he hath spoken.* This is the temper of such a one in the general, and he preserves it in particular instances, when perhaps the dearest interests in life are brought into question, or when God is pleased awfully to determine in a manner most directly contrary to his wishes and his prayers. When the dearest enjoyments are removed; when the heaviest burthens are imposed, when the most painful strokes are felt, it is his desire and labour to say, with the temper of his blessed Redeemer, *The cup which my heavenly Father putteth into my hand, shall I not drink it?* He kisses the hand and rod which corrects him, and says with the humblest submission, Let deliverance come when thou pleasest, and how thou pleasest.

3. To walk before the Lord doth farther express a life of cheerful dependence.

It is most certain that the great Author of our beings is their continual support. *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;*

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and the eyes of all wait upon him, that he may give them their supply in due season. In this respect the greatest and the meanest of created beings stand entirely on a level. And as the pious soul knows and feels this dependence, he humbly acknowledges it even in circumstances of the greatest security and abundance; and when, humanly speaking, he seems most independent, he comes continually to the throne of God, to ask of him day by day his daily bread. And in such a sense of his own emptiness and dependance he is cheerful and easy, rejoicing that he hath such a friend above, and receiving all the bounties of his providence with peculiar pleasure, when he thinks of that gracious hand from which it proceeds; which leads me most naturally to add,

4. That to *walk before the Lord* doth also express a life of praise and grateful acknowledgment.

It is most true that *every good and every perfect gift is from above*, and the good man feels it and owns it. He observes his mercies, how numerous and how various they are, and by how many tender and endearing circumstances they are recommended; and

he considers them all as proceeding from the divine care and favour. He is far from ascribing prosperity and success to some lucky turn of fortune, to his own prudence in contriving, and dexterity in executing, his affairs, or to the favourable interposition of any second causes; but he sees the hand of God in all, sees it with pleasure, and sees it with surprise, that the great and holy Majesty of heaven should take notice of so mean and so sinful a creature. Nay farther, the man that thus *walks before the Lord* considers him as the Author of all good to the whole universe, as well as to himself; and, being formed to so charitable and generous a temper of mind as to regard the happiness of his fellow creatures as his own, he is often rejoicing in it, and owning the goodness of God as the great fountain of it. And as he well knows that this great, constant, and universal Benefactor is always present with him, it is most natural that his *heart should overflow with love, and his tongue with praise.* He will not therefore perform such devotional exercises as a task to which duty constrains him even contrary to his inclination; but will rather consider it as an instance of the most agree-

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able self-indulgence. He will delight himself in the Almighty, and therefore he will always call upon God. As new mercies are descending upon him, new praises will be arising, and he will most cordially and cheerfully say with the Psalmist, *I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*

5. To *walk before the Lord* must imply a life of vigorous zeal for his interest.

Under the impressions of that gratitude, which we have been describing, it is most natural to inquire, *what shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?* and in that inquiry it is to the pious soul most pleasing to recollect that God, my great and most bountiful Benefactor, has a cause and interest on earth which is perpetually dear to him; and he hath recommended it to my care, and stands by me to observe how far I regard it. And shall he see that I neglect it, while he is taking such tender and unwearied care of me and my little interests, which deserve not so much as to be named with his? Shall I overlook his concerns as if they were foreign to me? God forbid. No, I will make it the business of my life to act in subservience to

his wise and gracious schemes, so far as I am capable of knowing what they are, and will reckon it my honour, rather than my calamity, if he should call me even to sacrifice my life itself to them. Whether I live, I would live unto the Lord; or whether I die, I would die unto the Lord; living or dying, I would be the Lord's.

With these sentiments doth the good man set himself to inquire how he may most effectually promote this great interest, and the glory of God in the happiness of his creatures; and surveys his station in life attentively, that he may judge of the opportunities which it may give to him for that purpose. And rejoices in the advantages of his genius, education, rank, estate, or employment, chiefly as it is improvable in such services as these.

6. As the consequence of all the former, *to walk before the Lord* implies a life of faithful obedience.

Hence it is, that we so often read of *walking in the laws and statutes, the commands and ordinances of God*, as parallel to the phrase used in the text. And it is obvious, that nothing can be more reasonable than such a

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view of its signification. If I consider myself as in the presence of a God, whose perfections and glories are infinite, who is armed with almighty power to avenge every breach of his law, and whose overflowing goodness always inclines him favourably to regard, and bountifully to reward every humble observer of it; and, at the same time, think with what constant indulgence he has borne my provocations against it, with what uninterrupted favours he hath been still *drawing me as with the cords of a man* and the bands of love; how can I bear the thought of going on to offend him! What temptation should ever prevail upon me deliberately to say, in words or in action, for this will I break through all my obligations to God; for this will I violate his law, and so dare his vengence and trample on his grace. Is this, oh blessed God! language for such an obliged creature to speak, even in its heart? Oh, how much better were it, to have no tongue to speak, to have no soul to think, than to utter such a word, or to harbour such a thought? Let my language ever be the reverse of this. *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.* What thou forbiddest, I would care-

fully avoid; what thou commandest, I would resolutely perform; and I would cheerfully go on in the strength of thy grace, under these restraints and regulations, even to the end of my course, till death comes a welcome messenger to transport me to a world where my obedience, and therefore my happiness, will be complete and eternal. Having thus shown at large what it is to *walk before the Lord*, I now proceed,

II. To consider those engagements to it which the text seems to suggest.

And they are these two: we are *before the Lord*, and we *are in the land of the living*. The wise and pious soul will find a strong argument in each of these thoughts, to engage him to walk before the Lord. Let me endeavour, a little more particularly, to address each of them to your consciences, and to my own.

1. Let us consider that we are *before the Lord*, and let us often reflect what a being he is before whom we are; for that will be a noble engagement to such a conduct.

You know how remarkably God himself suggests this thought to Abraham in this very view. *I am the Lord God Almighty.*

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Walk thou before me, and be thou perfect. Let us often review those transcendent perfections and glories by which Jehovah, our God, before whom we are, is distinguished from other beings. Let us recollect, what in a very imperfect manner we may be said to know of his self-existence and self-sufficiency; of his omnipresence, and omniscience; of his almighty power, and unsearchable wisdom; of his inexhaustible goodness, unspotted holiness, and invariable fidelity; and surely we must own, that decency, and gratitude, and interest, all concur to require and oblige us to walk before him in the manner we have now been describing.

1. A sense of decency will surely require us to maintain such serious and affectionate regards to the Divine Being, in whose presence we are.

There is implanted in the breast of every human creature something of a principle of generous ambition, a desire of appearing to those that are round about him as the object of esteem, and the object of love: especially in the eyes of those who are themselves such. When we converse with persons remarkable for noble birth, exalted genius,

who, in the midst of wealth, and grandeur, and power, retain a condescending, obliging, and generous temper; how natural is it to endeavour by a decent behaviour to recommend ourselves to their friendship, at least solicitously to avoid what might incur their censure and their contempt. Were we frequently in the presence chamber of a sovereign prince as remarkable for the ornaments and beauties of his mind, as the dignity of his royal station; or were we sure that he would strictly inquire into our character and behaviour, we should surely be concerned that he might think kindly and honourably of us, though we had no expectations of any farther advantage from him. Nay, when conversing with persons nearer to our own rank in life, who are eminent for learning, wisdom, and goodness; and whose names, perhaps, are sounding abroad with distinguished honours where they are otherwise unknown; we find ourselves at once restrained and animated by their presence, and would fain reflect a few rays from them, and learn, according as the inferiority of our character may admit, to think, and to speak, and to act like them. And if they take any peculiar notice of

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us, and stoop down to us that they may assist us in rising towards them; with what pleasure do we observe it and reflect upon it. But oh! how much more desirable is it to be approved and honoured by the great Eternal Mind, to whose perfections the most learned philosophers, the most exalted princes, nay, the most illustrious angels, retain but a faint and imperfect resemblance.

2. A sense of gratitude will require us to *walk before the Lord* with this religious regard to his presence.

Our souls are formed with a tender sense of gratitude, which in many cases we cannot resist. We are immediately touched with the kindness of our fellow-creatures, and that in some instances where they really do us but very little service. It is enough that they express a benevolent and obliging intention, and appear desirous of pleasing and assisting us if they could. The meanest person with whom we converse in life has this power of making a conquest upon us. Nay, we feel some sentiments of the same nature, when we observe any thing which looks like generosity and kindness, even in the brutes; and almost wish that they were capable of

receiving some better sort of returns from us, than the inferiority of their natures will admit. How much more then are our souls melted and commanded by repeated and important instances of goodness, from some excellent person so far above us as that we are incapable of making him any considerable returns; especially if it be one whom we know we have affronted and slighted, so as to deserve his displeasure rather than his friendship. And is it necessary that I should particularly name this most important, most generous, and most injured benefactor? Do not our hearts immediately tell us who it is? Let the recollection of former years teach us, let the review of one week or day testify to us whom we have most frequently offended, yet from whom we have received the greatest and most constant benefits. Who called us at first into existence? who endowed us with the faculties of this rational nature? who so completely formed this machine of flesh and blood, so curiously adapted it to all the purposes of animal life? who took us out of our mother's womb? who watched over us in our tender infancy, and reared and formed us to more advanced age? who hath fed and

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clothed us all our lives long until this moment, and provided for us our necessaries, our conveniences, and our pleasures? Who chose out for us our dearest friends, and filled their hearts with that stock of tenderness for us which makes our burthens sit so easy, and gives our creature enjoyments their most exquisite relish? who is this very moment holding our souls in life, and calling us to consider and acknowledge his goodness? above all, who hath awakened in our hearts the pleasing hopes of a happy immortality, and sent his Son to lead us to it at the hazard, at the expense of his dearest blood? and can it, after all, be a matter of debate with us whether we should remember this God, or forget him; whether we should live as in his presence, or behave as at a distance from him? Methinks, after this it should hardly be necessary to add,

3. That our interest also requires us thus to *walk before the Lord*, because all our present and future happiness entirely depends on his care and favour.

What, if we can allow ourselves for a moment to imagine it a supposable case; what, I say, if God had lodged such a stock

of power in us, and made such provision at once for our happiness, as that we should no longer hold it in a continued dependence on him? Could we for that reason slight and forget him? Could our hearts, bad as they are, harbour a thought of so much baseness as this, "I now need God no more, and therefore I will regard him no more?" But oh! how far different is our state, and how much different must it always be! It depends upon the Sovereign Lord of all to crown the remainder of our days with prosperity and comfort, or to reduce us to the lowest degree of indigence and misery. It depends on him to lengthen out our lives to future years, or to put an immediate period to them. And when our souls are entered on the eternal state, it depends on him to fix them in abodes of joy or of torment, and to make them the companions of angels or of fiends. Judge then whether it be not as much our interest as our duty to walk before him, to behave as in his presence. And we may observe farther,

4. That the consideration of our being *in the land of the living* may afford a farther argument for our walking as before him.

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To enforce this motive, let us consider how advantageous our present situation is, by how many remarkable interpositions of divine goodness and care we have been continued in it, and how nearly it borders on the land of the dead. Obvious but important thoughts! the review of which will conclude the discourse.

1. Consider the advantages which attend our present situation while we continue *in the land of the living*, more particularly as it is a land of pleasure, of service, and of hope.

The *land of the living* is a land of pleasure. We sometimes call it a wilderness, and it is indeed so, when we compare it with the heavenly Canaan; with those regions of light and glory above. But it is a paradise when compared with those seats of misery which our sins had deserved, or with what divine vengeance might easily and justly have made it. Though some of its original glories are faded and tarnished by the curse which its inhabitants have brought upon themselves; yet still there are a thousand beauties and ornaments remaining.

We need not travel into other climates so distinguished by their fruitfulness and plea-

sure as to be called the garden of Europe; nay, we need not go to the seats of the great and noble, where art has changed the face of nature, and called up a gay creation of its own; the lawn, the vista, the garden, and the grove, with these embellishments, may soothe the imagination with some peculiar pleasure: but, surely, it is not necessary to search out such retreats as these to justify the remark I have now been making. It is sufficient if we step out of one of our own villages, especially in such a season as this*, and to view nature in its simplest forms with no more cultivation than merely what the necessities of mankind require. Even this may suffice to awaken in our mind a most pleasing sensation, and to cause our heart to overflow with gratitude and joy. The vigorous and unfading splendour of the sun which through succeeding ages gilds every scene with its various rays, and clothes every earthly object with every visible beauty which it wears; the milder glories of the silver moon, and the number, order, and lustre of the stars, which furnish out so mag-

* This Sermon was first preached at Kibworth, a village in Leicestershire, May 26, 1728.

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nificent a view, that we rejoice in the grateful vicissitude of darkness, which draws aside the radiant veil by which it was before concealed. Where shall I stop? the azure firmament, the balmy air, the verdant fields, the fragrant flowers, the shady trees, the warbling notes of those untaught lovely musicians which *sing amongst the branches*, the health and the sprightliness of the various tribes of animals with their little joyful offspring. Who, if his heart be not rendered incapable of joy by tyrannic passions or guilty suspicions, who can behold these things, and not rejoice? And these are not the peculiar pleasures of kings and of princes, but the daily entertainments of the labourer and the shepherd; and, therefore, so much the more delightful to a benevolent heart, because shared in common with them.

I may add, that when the intelligent and reflecting mind considers the whole as a system, and observes how the several parts of this globe, and of the creatures that inhabit it, are placed in an harmonious subordination; and how the provision made for the support of the rest terminates at last in the happiness of man, for whom this magnificent

fabric was reared, and for whom it was stored with all this goodly furniture; we discern a thousand relative and comparative beauties, distinct from the sensitive charms to be found in single objects.

Nor is it by any means to be forgotten, that we are not here, like Adam in paradise, alone, but surrounded with creatures in our own form; many of them delightful companions and tender friends, with whom the sorrows of life lose half their sting, and its pleasures double their relish. Nay, God himself condescends to take up his abode amongst us, and sometimes to shed around us a brighter day, by *lifting up* on our souls *the light of his countenance.* And can we, after all, forget our great benefactor in such a situation as this? Did some great and generous friend invite me to pass but a single summer, or a few months or weeks in some delightful retreat, and there to furnish me with the most agreeable entertainment and conversation, should I not think myself obliged to own the favour, and to behave in a grateful and respectful manner? But, oh God! how much more art thou doing for us, who placest us for life in such a land as this; where so many pleasing objects always

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surround us, and where if for a little while a wintry veil be drawn over a part of them, it is only that they may afterwards appear so much the fairer, refreshed with new life, and animated with greater vigour?

2. But farther consider, *the land of the living* is a land of hope.

It were sad indeed, did we regard it as a fine road, through which we were passing to our execution; then all the lustre which we view around us would serve only to deepen the gloom of the infernal prison, and to make us more exquisitely sensible of those treasures of wrath which are laid up there. But, adored be Divine Grace! sinful as we are, we are yet under the sound of his gospel, the offers of mercy, and I hope I may add as to many of us, the near views of an eternally glorious inheritance, to which we might not only patiently, but cheerfully and thankfully pass through deserts of thorns or even seas of fire.

3. And once more this *land of the living* is a land of service as well as of enjoyment and hope.

The dead praise not God, neither any that go down into silence; but *the living, the living* may and should praise him. We are each of

us in stations of life in which we are capable of doing something, either in a more public or private capacity, for the glory of God and the benefit of mankind. Glorious end! which makes our suns shine brighter, and gives our rational faculties their full scope and noblest exercise; without which their very excellency would have made them our burthen; since, separate from this end, they would only have served to tell us that we were made in vain, and to show earth, adorned and furnished as it is, but as a golden toy or a painted bubble. But when we consider it as a pleasing abode, in which our Heavenly Father has fixed us, to serve him now, in the views of living and reigning with him throughout all eternity, every subservient blessing rises unspeakably in its value, and the whole unites into one powerful argument to *walk before the Lord in the land of the living;* an argument greatly confirmed and enforced by considering,

4. By how many remarkable interpositions of divine care and goodness we have been continued here.

Let me lead you back, my friends! in your grateful reflections, to circumstances of former danger and distress. Why have we passed through calamities, by which others

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have fallen? Why do we so often walk over the graves of those whom we knew younger and more vigorous than ourselves? Why have we already counted twenty or thirty, perhaps fifty or sixty years of life, when diseases lurk in every vein and every nerve, and fatal accidents beset us in every journey and every step? Have we not daily reason to set up, as it were, our Ebenezer, our stone of remembrance and of thankfulness, and to say, Hitherto the Lord hath helped us to acknowledge the divine power and goodness in repeated signal deliverances, even when we said, as we thought, *in the cutting off of our days, that we were deprived of the residue of our years.* What were our purposes in those moments of extremity? what were our resolutions and our vows when we saw as it were *the arm of the Lord made bare* in our favour? Did we not say, with Hezekiah on a like occasion, *we shall walk softly or tenderly before him all our days*, with the most solicitous care to avoid whatever might prove offensive, and to embrace every opportunity of pleasing and serving him? Never let us forget the vows of God which are upon us, but let our conduct be agreeable to them. Especially,

3. Let us *walk before the Lord in the land*

of the living, since we are just on the confines of the land of the dead.

Whatever former deliverances God may have wrought out for us, he has prolonged only a dying life. We are raised from one distemper or accident, to fall by another; and our eyes, which are now delighted with so many pleasing objects, must soon be closed in the darkness of the grave. There they will, indeed, behold man no more as the inhabitant of the earth, but our souls will yet remain wakeful and vigorous; and oh, what a journey must they then take! what regions will open upon them in the spacious extent of the unseen world! How important, and how different the scenes there! as different as the glories of Paradise and the horrors of Tophet. And need I say for whom these widely distant abodes are intended? Let conscience say to whom they are respectively suited. Who should dwell with God above but those who have walked before him below? or whom should he drive to eternal distance but those who have said unto him, *Depart from us*, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways?

Oh! remember that while I am speaking to you, your moments are hastening on, and

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that, amazing as the difference is between the *lands of the living* and the dead, the departing soul takes its flight in an instant from the one to the other, and our own spirits, thoughtless as they are, may be fixed in that awful, unchangeable state before to-morrow's sun rises upon the earth, which may perhaps shine upon our breathless clay.

Oh! that whenever the great God of our lives shall determine the period of them, the change may be as happy as it will be important! May we be found under the shelter of gospel grace, of the blood and the righteousness of the Redeemer! May our works be found filled up before God, and our souls actually walking as before him. Then shall we have a joyful transition to his more immediate and more glorious presence; and find so solid and so sublime a felicity there as shall convince us that those regions alone deserve to be called the land of the living; where all his servants shall serve him with everlasting vigour, and walk before him in unknown forms of triumph and of glory. Amen.

SERMON IV.

THE IMPOVERISHED SAINT REJOICING IN GOD.

HAB. iii. 17, 18.

Although the figtree should not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation.

NOTHING can be more faithful than the warning which our Lord gave to his people, *In the world ye shall have tribulation*[1]; nothing more comfortable than the promise which he makes them, *In me ye shall have peace.* And forasmuch as the saints of the Old and New Testament dispensation are incorporated into one body in Christ, they share in the same divine consolations. The promise of Abraham is now come upon the Gentiles[2], and we find, on the other hand, that much of the joy of the Christian believer is expressed by those who, like that holy patriarch, saw Christ's

[1] John xvi. 33.

[2] Gal. iii. 14.

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day in a very distant prospect; indeed so much that, considering the state of things amongst them, we might well admire at it, did we not know that *the secret of the Lord was* then, in an extraordinary way of discovery, *with them who feared him*, to show them the glorious contents of his covenant[3] through all the veils with which it was surrounded. Of this the text is a remarkable instance. It is a part of one of the sublimest passages any where extant, even in the scripture itself. A prayer of Habakkuk, in which he takes such a survey of the divine perfections and glories, especially God's almighty power and awful majesty, as might impress the souls of all that read it with some correspondent sentiments of devotion; and might serve to introduce the intended denunciations of his judgments against those who had violated the precepts of so great as well as so holy a lawgiver. In the words immediately preceding the text, he intimates that a very terrible calamity was coming on his people, the very thought and view of which threw his mind, softened as it was with pious and humane sentiments, into a painful and almost overwhelming consternation. *When I heard*

[3] Psa. xxv. 14.

this, says he, *my belly trembled*[4], i. e. my heart beat with unusual palpitations, my breath was almost interrupted, and all my animal frame laboured; my lips quivered at the voice which I secretly heard, and were hardly able to express my astonishment at it. *Rottenness entered into my bones*, i. e. I grew into a languor and feebleness, as if I had been in a long decay, so that the very marrow of my bones was corrupted and wasted. So earnestly desirous was I that I might, some way or another, find rest and repose to my soul in the day of approaching trouble and distress, *for when he comes up against the people, he will invade them with troops.* This last expression may perhaps have some more immediate reference to the Chaldean army, which was quickly to be led on against Israel, to avenge the quarrel of God's covenant. But it may in the general describe any desolating judgment, since all the calamities of life are like troops in the army of the great Lord of hosts, to be disposed of according to his sovereign command. Thus did the first threatening of approaching judgments discompose the mind of this holy prophet; yet after a short pause and recollection of spirit he expresses

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[4] ver. 16.

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the most serene tranquillity, the most exalted joy, in a sense of his own interest in the divine favour. Whatever he could suppose to happen, how deep and how various soever his afflictions might be, yet says he in the words of the text, *Although the figtree should not blossom, neither should fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive should fail, and the fields should yield no meat; though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there should be no herd in the stall; yet would I rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation.*

It will be both a noble and delightful employment to take a more particular survey of the triumphs of the prophet's faith. Let us then, my brethren, turn aside, and see this great sight, *a bush* as it were *burning* in the fire of affliction, *yet not consumed*, because God is there. Oh! that we might hear the voice of God speaking to us out of the midst of it; speaking in so gracious a manner as to make himself known to us as our father and our portion; that we may learn the triumphant song, that we may say with such sentiments of soul as the holy prophet doth: *Though the figtree should not blossom, and there should be no fruit in the vine, though the*

labour of the olive should fail, and the field should yield no meat; though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there should be no herd in the stall; yet will we rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our salvation.

Observe, I entreat you, how calamitous a circumstance is here supposed, and how heroic a faith is expressed. We will consider each, and conclude with a few reflections.

I. Let us observe how calamitous a circumstance is here supposed, or rather what a scene of various calamity.

The prophet here supposes himself deprived of the entertainments of life, straitened as to the necessaries of it, surrounded with a complication of disappointing providences, and with a melancholy prospect before his eyes as to what was yet to come. Each of these particulars is clearly expressed or strongly implied in the comprehensive words which are here before us.

1. The prophet supposes himself deprived of the entertainments and pleasures of life.

He supposes that *the figtree should not blossom, and there should be no fruit in the vine,*

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and also *that the labour of the olive should fail.* Canaan, you know, was a very pleasant country; it did not only abound with corn, but it flowed with milk and honey. Many an Israelite could once say with Job, that *he* [5] *dipped his foot in butter*[5], and that he might almost have washed his feet in cream, as that expression signifies, and that the rocky part of his land, which was unfit for other improvement, even poured him out *rivers of oil*, being so richly planted with fruitful olives. There were figs in so great abundance that we read of no less than two hundred cakes of them brought as a present from one private family[6], and as a thousand lumps of raisins or dried grapes were added to them, so it is intimated that in the tribe of Judah, where Habakkuk lived[7], men might find grapes in the highway, so as to have made no scruple of fastening the beast on which they rode to a vine, or, if there were occasion, of dying their garments in its precious juice. *Binding his foal to the vine, and his ass's colt to the choice vine, he shall wash his garments in wine,* [8] *and his clothes in the blood of grapes*[8]. But the wrath of God can easily turn a fruitful land into barrenness *for the iniquity of them*

[5] Job xxix. 6.

[6] 1 Sam. xxv. 18.

[7] Hab. i. 1.

[8] Gen. xlix. 11.

who dwell therein, and the prophet supposes such a case. He supposes all these delicious fruits, which I have now mentioned, to be lost; the figtree failing to blossom, and consequently becoming, instead of an ornament and a blessing, an incumbrance to the ground; the vine perhaps shooting out its branches, but yielding no fruit, or at least ripening none. And as for *the labour of the olive*, that is the usual employment of pressing the olives and straining the oil, he supposes it to fail, or, as it is most emphatically in the original, *to lie*, or deceive them, so that when they had taken the trouble to gather and press them, they should find none of that rich liquor, that flowing fatness, which they desired and expected; but all their labour should be lost, and the fats found almost empty of juice, even when the press was full of stones and of skins; a circumstance which must frequently happen in an unkindly year.

Thus the prophet represents himself as deprived of his usual plenty and delights; of *wine that makes glad the heart of man, and oil that maketh his face to shine*. But you will perhaps say, there might still remain *bread, which strengtheneth man's heart*[9]; and, sup-

[9] Psa. civ. 15.

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ported by that staff of life, we may well suppose that a philosopher, and much more a prophet, might make himself tolerably easy, though destitute of the rest; which leads me to add,

2. That he supposes himself to be likewise in a great measure straitened as to the necessaries of life.

I might here observe that the several kinds of fruit mentioned before were not only for delight, but also of important use. It is plain, from several passages in the Old Testament, that dried grapes and figs made a considerable part of their food, and oil often served them instead of butter; so that the loss of these would be much greater to them than to us in these climates. But besides this, the prophet also supposes that *the fields should yield no meat*, neither grass for cattle *nor corn for the service of man*[1]; so that the produce of the dairy must cease of course. And whereas it might be urged that in the failure of these they would still have the flocks and herds to subsist upon, the prophet farther supposes that *the flocks* of smaller cattle *should be cut off from the fold, and the herd* of larger beasts *from the stalls* where they

[1] Psa. civ. 14.

were fed. So that, you see, he puts the sad case of having neither fruit, nor corn, nor flesh. And then, had he been lodged in a palace of marble and cedar, clothed in purple and fine linen, and surrounded with heaps of silver and gold, or with all the most splendid furniture which they could furnish; all these riches and magnificence would have served to upbraid rather than to relieve his calamity. So that it is really as if he had said, "Though I should be reduced to so great extremity as not to know where to find my necessary food, though I should look round about me on an empty house and a desolate field, and see the marks of the Divine scourge where I had once seen the fruits of God's bounty, *yet* still *will I rejoice in the Lord*, even when, if sense alone were to judge, he would seem to hide himself from me." For that likewise is intimated, and we observe,

3. The prophet supposes such a concurrence of calamities, that Providence should seem, as it were, to interest itself in his disappointment and sorrow.

You know it frequently happens that those years which are not very favourable to the

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fruit-trees, produce a plentiful harvest; or what is wanting in both may in some measure be made up by the health and fruitfulness of the cattle; but you see it is most evident that here all are supposed to fail together. And, perhaps, on a more accurate examination it will be found that he represents two of the most dreadful calamities in life as uniting their force, I mean, famine and war; for I think the latter of these may be intimated in the expression of *the flocks being cut off from the fold.* God had just before spoke of invading them with his troops, and perhaps they might be troops of enemies who should slay their cattle. Some commentators of considerable note have thought that all the desolations here described might be occasioned by the armies of the Chaldeans ravaging their fields and vineyards, and destroying the fruits of the earth. But that could hardly hinder the fig-tree from blossoming; and, therefore, it seems more natural to imagine that the prophet here represents a great dearth in time of war, when there was but little produced, and that little seized and used, and perhaps too, wasted by the enemy before their very eyes. This was a

circumstance peculiarly vexatious regarding the hand of man in it, and when the hand of God was regarded, it would in one view be peculiarly grievous. For they might be ready to say, Alas! God seems to be an ally and confederate with our enemies against us. This may be the case of the most eminent saints. It was apparently thus with Job, when, at the same time that the Chaldeans and Sabæans had plundered his beasts, and slain his servants, he immediately heard that lightning fell on his sheep in one place, and in another, a storm overthrew the house of his eldest son and buried all his children in its ruins: so that he might truly say, that God *had multiplied his witnesses against him, and had broken him with breach upon breach.* And this has, in many other instances, been the afflicted circumstance of some of the dearest of God's children. Their heavenly Father has seemed, in the course of his providence, not only to frown upon them, but to fight against them; and, whereas it was said of Joseph, that *whatsoever he did it prospered*, nothing shall succeed under their hand; and to all their present disappointment, indigence

SERM. IV. and sorrow may in their case be added, as here in that of the prophet.

4. A very melancholy prospect with regard to futurity.

Habbakkuk you see, supposes the blossom as well as the fruit to fail; the blossom of the figtree which sometimes put out those buds in one year which are not to be ripened till the next. He also supposes the whole stock of cattle destroyed; not only that the ewes should cast their lambs and the cows their calves, but that the flock and the herd, i. e. the young and the old of both should be cut off together; so that if, by any means, a little respite and supply should be obtained, it would only serve a little to prolong a poor necessitous and calamitous life, and yield them no probable hope of a restoration to their former prosperity and plenty. He supposes, as the prophet elsewhere speaks, *their root to be as rottenness* at the same time that their blossom went up like dust[2]; so that present disappointments were only a specimen of what was farther to be apprehended.

[2] Isa. v. 24.

Thus much for the dark side of the prospect, and it must be acknowledged to be

dark indeed. What would he do? how would he behave when deprived of the enjoyments of life, straitened in the necessaries of it; when surrounded with a concurrence of various afflicting providences, and discouraged with a melancholy prospect of continued and increasing distress? Yet all this serves only to illustrate what we are next to consider,

II. That heroic temper which the prophet expresses in the midst of all.

There were undoubtedly some unhappy creatures who might have shared in such public calamity, whose afflictions would have been more than doubled by the tumult and disorder of their own spirits. Many in whom those words of Isaiah[3] would have been verified; *They shall pass through the land hungry and hardly bestead;* through that land which was once so pleasant, but now must be so mournful a scene; where they might perhaps see the poles of their vineyards, and the trunks of their figtrees and their olives, the fields where their corn once grew, and the folds where their flocks were enclosed, or the meadows where their herds had been feeding; *they shall pass*

[3] Isa. viii. 21.

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through this land, says Isaiah, *hungry and hardly bestead; and it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and shall curse* not only *their king*, *but their God too;* whose protection they foolishly promised themselves as it were at all adventures, and shall look upwards with impotent malice and rage against Him *who sits enthroned in the heavens.* But oh! how unlike to this is the temper which the prophet expresses in the words of the text! words which methinks are worthy of being *written* as *with a diamond on a rock* for ever. Oh that by Divine grace they might be deeply engraven on each of our hearts! *Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation.* Concise as this form of speaking is, it evidently implies or expresses the following particulars. That in the day of his distress he would fly to God; that he would maintain a holy composure of spirit under this dark dispensation; nay, that in the midst of all he would indulge to a sacred joy in God, and a cheerful expectation from him.

1. The text implies that the prophet would fly to God as his refuge in the midst of all his calamity.

As Micah, when he complains that he was *left naked and bare as the trees when they had gathered the summer fruit, and even the very gleanings of the vineyard, so that there was no cluster to eat;* that *his* pious *friends*, in whose company he might have comforted himself a little under his afflictions, *were perished out of the land*, and succeeded by treacherous and cruel pretenders to friendship, so that he knew not to whom on earth he could apply for relief; says, *Yet will I look unto the Lord, I will wait upon the God of my salvation*[4]: so Habakkuk plainly implies, that he also would look to God; that when creature-streams were cut off, he would have recourse to the fountain; and, however his enemies might surround him or oppress him, they could none of them prevent that. If he were shut up in the straitness of a siege, and a famine he had described should arise from thence, when armies of foes beset him on every side, so that none could come in to bring succour, and none go out to give or to gain intelligence, they could not cut off his intercourse with heaven; and there was his refuge, and there was his hiding place. And there will always be a refuge for the

[4] Micah vii. 1, 7.

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saints, for *God is their dwelling place* not only in this or that age, but *through all generations*[5]. *His name is* still *as a strong tower*, more lasting than bulwarks of brass, or walls of adamant; and the righteous still runneth into it and is safe[6]. This the prophet knew, and, therefore, he determined that he would flee to it by prayer; and, as the pious Mr. Henry very justly expresseth it, "They who have made it their business in a day of prosperity may make it their shelter in a day of adversity." In consequence of this, we may add,

[5] Ps. xc. 1.

[6] Proverbs xviii. 10.

2. The words of the prophet farther imply, that he would maintain a holy composure of soul in these distressing circumstances.

He would not, like the guilty and miserable creatures we mentioned above, *fret himself in anywise to do evil.* He would not torment himself with gloomy apprehensions and vexatious reflections and comparisons, thinking how it was with others, and how it might have been with him; how much easier and better, even by some little turn in providence. No; but he would acquiesce in the present scene as on the whole right and fit, though on principles and views he did not particularly understand. That rejoicing

in God, which Habakkuk here expresses, implies this, and a great deal more than this, as you will presently see. And, no doubt, he would have acted on this resolution, and, had all these calamitous things befallen him, and, to increase all his sorrows, had he been as unequally yoked as Job was, so that the dearest companion of his life had tempted him, in a fit of murmuring and discontent, to *curse God and die;* he would have answered the motion with indignation, and would have argued himself, and if possible her too, into a sweet tranquillity and humble resignation with that thought, *Shall we receive good from the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil also*[7]*?* Like David, he would have been *dumb* with silence, and *never have opened* his *mouth*[8] to utter one repining word, because it was God who did it; he would rather have opened his mouth to plead for him and to praise him. Which leads me to add, SERM. IV.

[7] Job ii. 10.

[8] Ps. xxxix. 9.

3. The prophet resolves that he would indulge to a holy joy in God in the midst of these discouraging circumstances.

Observe, I beseech you, the glorious emphasis of the text. The former heads are

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suppressed, though they are strongly implied. This holy man does not say, "I will fly unto the Lord, I will submit to his rod with humble silence, and bear his indignation because I have sinned against him. This language had been wise and good, worthy his character as a saint and as a prophet; but it had been below the present purposes and sentiments of his soul. He, therefore, says, *I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation.* Observe how emphatically it is said, how confidently and how resolutely it is repeated; that none might imagine it was a hasty word which dropped from him in some sudden rapture. No, when he had surveyed this state of indigence and distress in all its circumstances; when he had entered into a particular detail of figs, and vines, and olives, and corn, and flocks, and herds, and supposed all to be lost; yet, says he, notwithstanding all this, *I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.* Heroic confidence! illustrious faith! unconquerable love! Who would not wish himself in such distress as this, if while his *tribulations abounded, his consolations* in God *might* thus *much more abound?*

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Here, here, my brethren, is the security and the felicity of God's people; not that they are exempt from afflictions, but that they can thus triumph over them. It is thus that *unto the upright there ariseth light out of darkness*, while *the Lord is their light and their salvation*[9]. Nor was it an empty boast. Had the prophet seen such a day as he here supposes, he would, no doubt, have been ready to adopt the words of David, and have said in the midst of all that poverty and distress, *though the figtree doth not blossom, and there be no fruit in the vine, though the labour of the olive doth fail, and the fields yield no meat*, yet thou, Lord, by *lifting up the light of thy countenance upon me, hast put joy into my heart* more than *when corn, and wine, and oil increased*[1]. So true is the excellent remark of that pious author I mentioned above[2]. They who, when full, enjoyed God in all may, when empty, enjoy all in God.

[9] Ps. xxvii. 1. cxii. 4.

[1] Ps. lxiv. 6, 7.

[2] Henry in Loc.

4. The text farther intimates the cheerful expectation from God which the prophet would still maintain.

This must undoubtedly be the foundation of the joy which is expressed; for who could

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rejoice in a God from whom he had no expectation of good. Surely the utmost a creature could do, in such a case, would be to bow in silent submission, and own the divine justice or the divine sovereignty in cutting him off from all the farther bounties of Providence or grace. It is expectation which encourages our waiting upon him, as David strongly intimates[3], when he says, *My soul, wait thou only on God, for my expectation is from him.* And, surely, the prophet more than intimates such an expectation when he calls him *the God of his salvation:* even while he supposes his afflictions to be thus great and aggravated, q. d. "I know that all these dark scenes of his providence are consistent with his being *the God of my salvation.* There is a greater and better salvation than any of a temporal kind, and *though he were to slay me* even in the most dreadful manner, even by the want of my necessary food, *yet still would I trust in him*[4]. And it is well worth our while to observe, how, in dependence on this salvation, he springs forward with courage to encounter every difficulty which could be supposed to lie in his way. *God is my strength: he*

[3] Ps. lxii. 2.

[4] Job xiii. 15.

maketh my feet like hind's feet; he will make me to walk upon my high places: q. d. My soul is so refreshed and strengthened with the thoughts of God as *the God of my salvation*, that, were I in such circumstances as I have described, I would yet go forth with vigour, as the poor necessitous soldier does when pressed with the straitness of the seige, and commanded by a wise, able, and courageous general; he gathers strength from his distress, runs to the ramparts as swiftly as a roe, and, in spite of all opposition, asserts them as his own. SERM. IV.

Thus was the soul of this holy prophet secured and composed, delighted and elevated in the views of God, and his expectations from him; and in token of this composure and confidence, as well as for the instruction and comfort of others, he orders what he now writ to be made public, inscribing it to the chief musician on his stringed instrument, probably that he might tune it for the service of the sanctuary.

The review of these things hath been so delightful to me, that it hath only left me time to touch on a few of those reflections which would naturally arise from this impor-

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tant subject. Let me nevertheless recommend such as these to your serious regard and ampler meditation.

1. Let not the children of God be surprised or discouraged, if they are exercised with dark dispensations of Providence.

Perhaps I am addressing myself to some who have *drunk deep of the cup of affliction, and been emptied from vessel to vessel.* Think it not strange, my friends, though it may seem *a fiery trial, as if some new thing had happened to you.* They were in the number of those dearest servants of God, in the number of those *of whom the world was not worthy*, who *wandered about in sheep skins and in goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, and tormented*[5]. There may indeed be a mystery in this conduct of Providence towards you, but all is wisdom, and all is love; and the end of God in all is not only his own glory, but your truest good. Plenty and abundance might to you have proved like those luxurious pastures, by which the sheep are destroyed rather than nourished. Adversity may teach you a variety of useful lessons, which ordinances and comforts have been inculcating in vain. It may wean you from this empty, deceitful world, and teach you to seek all

[5] Heb. xi. 37, 38.

your treasure in God, and to long for your better, your only inheritance with him. It may quicken your diligence, and improve your moderation, and be a mean of exercising your daily trust and dependance on God, while you are in a literal sense asking that he would *give you your daily bread.* By such a poverty your soul may be enriched, and all the meanness of circumstance, all the contempt of an undiscerning world, to which it may perhaps expose you, may serve to *work out for you a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory*[6]. And oh, Christian, where is thy faith, if thou wouldst not with such consequences prefer it *to thousands of gold and silver?* In the mean time live upon those promises which have been to a thousand saints, now in glory, a staff and a song, in all the most barren stages of this wilderness, through which they passed before us, and as they went on erected, as it were, their Ebenezers in one place and another, and said, *Hitherto hath the Lord helped us*[7]. Those promises are still on record, and they will live when we and our children are dead; and succeeding saints, when called to pass through the like trials, shall experience the

[6] 2 Cor. iv. 17.

[7] 1 Sam. vii. 12.

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consolations of them. *When the poor and the needy seek water, and there is none, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Jacob will not forsake them*[8]. *Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed*[9]. *The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish*[1]; *for though the young lions may lack, and suffer hunger, they that fear the Lord shall not want any good thing*[2]. Christians! I appeal to your consciences whether you would barter away, I will not say your joy, but your poor trembling hope in God, and these gracious promises of his covenant, for the wealth of the rich, the power of the great, or the pomp of the most magnificent amongst the children of men? If you would not, as surely the weakest believer would not, then be contented, nay more, be thankful; wait on the Lord, and keep his way.

[8] Isa. xli. 17.

[9] Ps. xxxvii. 3.

[1] Prov. x. 3.

[2] Ps. xxxiv. 10.

2. Let not the children of this world glory in so precarious a portion as theirs.

You see, my friends, that, were you possessed of the greatest revenues, they might fail you. *The figtree might not blossom, and there might be no fruit in the vine; the labour of the olive might fail, and the fields might*

yield no meat. And if this were indeed the case, oh, what miserable creatures were you, who have no refuge in God, no portion in his care and favour! When God speaks of carnal sinners, it is well worth our while to observe what a sad counterpart there is to these words of the prophet which we have now been surveying: *I will make all their mirth to cease, and I will destroy their vines and their fig-trees*[3]; strongly intimating by such a connexion that when these creature-comforts were perished, all their joy must perish with them. Surely you are none of you so inexperienced in life as not to know that a thousand accidents may strip you of your earthly all; at least you are sure that death will quickly do it. Do not then delude yourselves with fleeting shadows. Do not say to your souls that *you have goods laid up for many years, in which you may eat, and drink, and be merry*[4]. Perhaps they are not laid up for many days or hours. Oh then, be exhorted to build your hopes on a firmer foundation, to secure some surer friend, some more durable treasure; which leads me to add,

[3] Hosea ii. 11, 12.

[4] Luke xvi. 19.

3. Let us all make it our great care to secure an interest in God through Christ.

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Whatever our circumstances in life are, we need this; and without it, in all *the fullness of our sufficiency we shall be in straits*[5], however our plantations, and our fields, and our folds may prosper. Now this we are through the divine goodness permitted and directed to offer to you. We have no commission to tell you that the Son of Jesse will give you fields and vineyards[6], or ensure the fruitfulness of those you already have. But if the favour of the Almighty God be better than a few acres of land or flocks of cattle, we come to you on a much better errand, for this is the message with which we are charged: Acquaint yourselves now with him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee, this great good, of which you have now been hearing, for so it is added, *then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and lift up thy face unto God*[7]. And lest the blessing should seem incredibly great, we point out the Lord Jesus as the person by whom *we are brought nigh to God, through whom we joy in him.* Oh, as you love your own souls, attend to the proposal, lest you be another day condemned, not only by all your criminal pursuits and unlawful pleasures, but by

[5] Job xx. 22.

[6] 1 Sam. xxii. 7.

[7] Job xxii. 21. 26.

all those otherwise honest and prudent labours which have been bestowed on these perishing goods, while for them you have neglected God, and poured contempt on his gospel and on his Son.

4. Let those of us who hope through grace that he is *the God of our salvation* make ourselves easy with regard to all future uncertainties.

Those of us who know the world best shall trust it least, and be the least ready to say that *our mountain stands so strong that we can never be moved.* But let us get rid of the burthen of unnecessary care by *casting all our care upon God.* Perhaps the trials we fear may never come, or, if they do, we are sure that God can lead us into no difficulties under which he cannot support us. Should we be reduced to the greatest extremities he can surprise us with unthought of methods of relief; and in the most dependent circumstances can give us greater pleasure in what we receive from the bounty of others than we ever found in what we might with the greatest propriety of human justice have called our own. Let us remember those words spoken at first to the pious and cha-

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ritable, and continued on record for the encouragement of every such soul. *The Lord himself shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, even like a spring whose waters fail not*[8]. Let our eyes therefore be ever towards the Lord, and let us cheerfully commit ourselves to his faithful care; for though not only vines and figtrees wither, not only flocks and herds die, but *heaven and earth pass away, and no more place be found for them, yet his word shall never pass away*[9], even that word which is the great charter and abstract of our temporal and eternal hopes, with the repetition of which I conclude my discourse, and in the faith and experience of which I heartily pray that every one of us may spend and conclude our lives[1]: *The Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.* Amen.

[8] Isa. lviii. 1.

[9] Matt. v. 19.

[1] Psalm lxxxiv. 12.

SERMON V.

THE FOLLY AND MISCHIEF OF IRRESOLUTION IN RELIGION.

1 KINGS, xviii. 21.

He said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.

YOU are not, my friends! to imagine that I now intend to entertain, or, perhaps, to a candid and intelligent auditory, I should rather say, to grieve and disturb you, with what might indeed be a schismatical discourse from these lively words, which have almost been rendered infamous by the very ignorant or very wicked manner in which they have often been handled. God forbid that under a shameful pretence of prosecuting the expostulation of Elijah, I should make it my business to inflame your passions against your Christian and Protestant brethren on account of some little diversity either in notions or forms; or should *handle the word of*

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God so *deceitfully* as they have done who have endeavoured to persuade their hearers that it is worshiping God to worship Jehovah through a Mediator in one Christian assembly, but serving Baal to worship the same Jehovah through the same Mediator in another. Let those have recourse to such childish artifices whose intemperate zeal stands in need of such feeble supports, and is not capable of a more rational defence. But, methinks, to a humane and a generous mind it must be a sad thought that any, who call themselves the ministers of the humble and gracious Redeemer, and perhaps would appropriate the name to themselves, should dare to press in the words of his Blessed Spirit to plead for that bitterness of zeal which is *earthly*, *sensual*, *devilish*, and to overthrow that mutual charity without which all our pretences to knowledge and faith are not only vain, but insolent.

Were I to insist on the points in controversy between us, I should rather have chosen those words of St. Paul to the Philippians, *Let your moderation be known unto all men*[1]; or those to the Romans, *Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful dispu-*

[1] Phil. iv. 5.

tations. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth, for the kingdom of God is not meats and drinks, nor does it consist in an eager zeal for or against such little things, *but in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*[2].

[2] Rom. xiv. 1. 3. 17.

But I am now entering on a very different subject of discourse, which I hope will not be the less acceptable because it is that in which all professing Christians pretend to be agreed. We are often urging you to yield yourselves to God, to *present your bodies as living sacrifices to him*, and *to walk before him as a willing and obedient people*. The arguments with which we enforce these exhortations are too strong to admit of any plausible debate; you are sometimes impressed with them, you form some resolutions, you make some attempts, yet your hearts are not fully set upon the work; other objects and pursuits engage you, so that you *start back like a deceitful bow*, and rest in a loose, distant purpose of resuming, you know not when, those serious thoughts which you cannot cordially embrace, and yet dare not totally discard. Apprehending this, therefore, to be a very common, and know-

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ing it to be a very hazardous case, I purpose from these words to represent to you at large the folly and the danger of irresolution in matters of religion, or, in the language of the text, of halting between Jehovah and Baal.

The occasion of the words was in short this, That wicked Ahab, *who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord*, was arrived at so daring a degree of impiety that he not only tolerated, but established the worship of Baal, nay, imposed it by penal laws, severely prosecuting the prophets of the Lord, and permitting his cruel queen to embrue her hands in their blood. The generality of the people yielded to and complied with the fashionable idolatry of the times; and yet as they had formerly been used to worship Jehovah, though in an irregular manner, as represented by the calves of Jeroboam, had still some remaining veneration for him, and probably were something awakened by the long and severe famine, in which his interposition was so apparent that the most negligent of them must see, and the most obstinate must own it. This seems to have occasioned some painful struggle in their minds, and perhaps, in private at least, some steps

towards a reformation, attended nevertheless with a great proneness to backslide, and destitute of that zeal and courage which was now especially necessary to stem the torrent of superstition and idolatry. This seems to have been their present temper, about the absurdity of which Elijah, with his natural spirit and fire, expostulates with them in the text, and, to end the debate, at once challenges the votaries of Baal to a public trial; in which, you know, the question was determined in a very awful manner, when fire descended from the Lord to consume the offering of Elijah, while the priests of Baal had for many hours been invoking their fictitious Deity in vain.

A great many useful observations might be made from the whole story; but I shall at present confine my discourse to the words which I at first read. And as it is evident that while sinners are wavering and unresolved whether they shall devote themselves to God, or *serve divers lusts and pleasures*, they are in effect divided between God and idols, it can surely be no abuse of the text to adopt it to such a purpose, and say to you, "Sirs, that hear me this day, if that be your character, *how long halt ye between two opinions?* How long do you walk like lame men,

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that tread tenderly, and are afraid to set their feet firmly to the ground (as the original word properly signifies) *If Jehovah be God, serve him; but if Baal, then serve him.*" If the arguments on the side of religion be, as surely they are, unanswerably strong, then be determined by them, and make it the one great business of your lives to pursue that; but if you can indeed clear it up to your own reason and conscience that it will on the whole be your wiser way to pursue the pleasures and business of life, then throw up the thoughts of religion at once, and go on courageously and resolutely in the contrary course. Do not commend what you will not practise, or do not practise what you cannot but condemn. But act like rational and considerate creatures; seriously weigh the arguments on both sides, and then determine once for all according to the preponderance of those on the one or the other. I shall here,

I. Make it my principal business to represent the folly and mischief of irresolution in the great matters of religion; and then,

II. Conclude with a short improvement.

The greater part of my discourse will be employed,

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I. In representing at large the folly and mischief of irresolution in the great matters of religion.

I shall endeavour, my friends, by the divine assistance, to bring the considerations which I am now to urge close to your consciences. May they be awakened to hearken to them! I would hope that a conviction will be fixed this day on some wavering heart, and that, like the Israelites, to whom the expostulation was addressed, you will be brought to fall down with humble reverence, and say, *The Lord he is God; the Lord he is God.* We have no miraculous powers, no visible fire to be commanded from heaven; but we have such cogent arguments to plead as might, one would think, scatter light on the most ignorant mind, and penetrate the most obstinate heart. Oh that the fire of the Lord might in a spiritual sense descend, and might inflame your souls with love and zeal, and render you *living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God*, since you must surely see it is a most *reasonable service* which is now demanded.

Now the folly and madness of irresolution in matters of religion will clearly and fully appear, if you consider the nature and cir-

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cumstances of the affair which you are undetermined about, and the consequences which will attend your continued irresolution.

1. Let me urge you seriously to consider the nature and circumstances of the thing you are undetermined about, which might alone be sufficient to demonstrate the folly of that temper against which I now argue. And here it may deserve your farther reflection, that the case itself is exceedingly plain and easy; that you have had it proposed and enforced in the most advantageous manner, and yet have continued already a long time irresolute and undetermined.

1. The case which you are undetermined about is exceedingly plain and easy.

When I enter upon the particular consideration of it, I cannot but wonder at the stupidity of those that call themselves rational creatures, and yet cannot come to a resolution about it. Methinks the Psalmist addresses himself to such in the most proper language, when he says, *Understand, ye brutish amongst the people: and, ye fools! when will ye be wise?*

Suppose, sirs! you should see a man studying for several weeks, or years together,

whether the sun or a coal were the more bright and glorious body; whether a drop or the ocean were larger; whether it were more agreeable to the nature and constitution of the human frame to tread on the earth, and to breathe on the air; or to inhabit the depths of the sea, or to feed upon fire. Would you take such a person for a philosopher, or for an idiot or lunatic? Why, surely, if you would but reflect a little upon it, one might prove that you sinners are deliberating about what is equally clear and obvious, and may as easily be determined by the dictates of reason and faith, as any of these things by the testimony of the senses. If you will but give me leave to take it for granted as the foundation of my argument, that you believe the existence of a God, and the truth of Christianity; I can prove to you, beyond all possibility of contradiction, that you are acting such a distracted part, while you halt irresolute between these two sentiments and interests; and I would, for a few moments, very seriously attempt to do it. Oh that Divine grace might fix the conviction!

You know that there is a most great and

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glorious Being, the universal Parent, and the Sovereign of all things. You know that He hath made you by his power, and that he continually supports you by his bounty. You know that, at this very moment while I am speaking to you, your lives and souls are in his hand; and that you owe your present capacity of deliberation and action entirely to his influence upon you, without which you would be insensible and motionless as the very stones under your feet. Yet you use these powers not in loving him, and serving him, and devoting yourselves to him, but, at best, in deliberating whether you shall behave like children, or like enemies, or perhaps in a series of wilful rebellion, even while you venture to call him your *Father which is in heaven.* The very last night you were protected and refreshed by him upon your beds, and this morning you have been fed from his stores, and by his particular care and direction; for every morsel you ever eat was by his providence intended for you. And as his corn and his wine have sustained you, so you have also been warmed with the fleece of his sheep, and furnished as it were from his rich ward-

robe with the garments you wear for your defence, refreshment, and ornament. It is the light of his sun which you now behold, which dresses the whole face of nature in so gay a form, and paints it with such a variety of colours and of beauties; and those dear friends and tender relatives, which are the most amiable objects which the sun discovers, and who do, as it were, add a brightness to his rays while they reflect them, were produced and supported by him: by him was every generous and benevolent sentiment planted in their heart, and every opportunity of helping you lodged in their hand. And is it still a matter of doubt and debate with you, whether you shall employ your lives in gratitude and duty to such a benefactor, or trample on his authority and his love; and treat him, at best, with neglect and contempt, if not with profane outrage and open opposition? You know that the brightest angels are continually bowing before his throne, and account it the perfection of their glory and felicity to execute his commands: but yet you are unresolved whether it will be worth your while to take example by those pure and holy spirits, or whether such weak mor-

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tals, worms as you are, may not find something more delightful than that intercourse with God which cherubims and seraphims are continually attending. In your profound wisdom, you find it difficult to resolve whether you shall form an alliance with that potent monarch who hath all the transports of heaven and all the agonies of hell at his command, or whether you shall trust to your own wisdom and power, though you are not able to command the meanest of his creatures, or to make one of your own hairs white or black without his concurrence.

You are in search of happiness, and with all the faculties of the rational nature about you, you cannot yet determine what sort of pleasure is the more excellent; that which ariseth from the contemplation of God and the sense of his love, the rectitude of our own actions, and the hope of eternal felicity; or that which may be found in the indulgence of those irregular appetites and brutal passions which would degrade us even below the rank of irrational animals, and turn the glory of our nature into its reproach.

You believe that the Lord Jesus Christ came down from heaven, and shed his blood

upon the cross, to purchase the salvation of apostate creatures, and to raise them to the hopes of everlasting glory; and you also believe this Jesus to be the eternal Son of God, *in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;* and yet it seems that you cannot determine whether the blessings which he purchased at so dear a rate will be worth your acceptance, or preferable to the pleasures of this evil world, which he came to redeem you from. You believe that he hath acted the part of the most generous and compassionate friend to you, and shed his blood to atone Divine justice, and lay a foundation for your hope and your peace; and yet you cannot tell whether you should acknowledge the favour by devoting yourselves to his service, or whether you should do your utmost to crucify him to yourselves afresh by your wilful refusal, and *trample upon his blood as a contemptible thing.* SERM. V.

Once more, you know that, as surely as you are now alive, you must shortly die; and that as soon as you quit this body, you must appear in the awful presence of God, and be fixed in an unalterable eternity; and yet you cannot determine whether it be the

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part of a wise man to make any provision for eternal happiness, to live with any regard to that world where he is to live for ever. You know that there are scenes of immortal pleasure and glory, which God hath provided for his own people, intended for the most glorious display of his magnificence and his love: but after a great deal of deliberation, you cannot tell whether it be worth your while to prefer them to the enjoyments and entertainments of sense, and to secure them at so dear a rate as submitting to the yoke of religion; that easy yoke which every wise man would choose even for its own sake, and to the pleasures of which he would gladly sacrifice something much better than sensual gratifications. On the other hand, you know there are exquisite, lasting, perpetual torments, prepared for those rebellious creatures who have set themselves up in opposition to the blessed God; *a Tophet deep and large, which the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, will kindle*, and in the dreadful stoves of which he will show his Almighty Power, and make his terrible wrath known; yet you know not whether it may not be worth your while to expose yourselves to them, that you may pur-

chase some poor present amusement, which will, in a few years, leave you mouldering in the grave, and despairing in hell. SERM. V.

This, my Christian friends! this is the wisdom of unconverted sinners. They do not only lay claim to the title of rational creatures, but many of them set up for persons of extraordinary prudence and contrivance, for politicians, or philosophers, or wits; and yet, by their actions, one would think they had not so much common sense as to know whether God or man be the more excellent, whether the blessings of the gospel are to be accepted or rejected, whether the pleasures of an angel or a brute be more worthy of their choice: in a word, whether it be eligible, after a few hours of mirth and gaiety upon earth, to lie down in everlasting burnings; or after the easy severities of a life spent in obedience to the rules of reason and religion, to spend an eternity with the shining inhabitants of heaven, in everlasting purity, and praise, and joy. Well, Sirs; the plainness and clearness of the case is one great aggravation of the folly which attends your irresolution about it.

2. Consider that, as the case is thus ex-

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ceeding plain, so it hath been proposed and enforced in the most advantageous manner; and you have had the happiest opportunities of bringing it to a conclusion.

Many of the great motives to a religious life are so obvious that the light of nature alone might lead you to observe and regard them. But because God knows the natural darkness and stupidity of your minds, he hath added a most gracious revelation of himself; in which those things which he requireth of you, and those which you, on the other side, may expect from him; are set forth in the most intelligible, and the most awakening manner. He hath written to you the great things of his gospel, as well as of his law, and he hath sent his servants unto you, *rising up early and sending them;* you have heard the case argued again and again in sermons, in books; you have seen it represented so clearly and so strongly that hardly any thing new can be said upon the subject, and yet you are undetermined. To the voice of his word, God hath been pleased to add that of his providence, and of his Spirit. This hath been the language of every mercy of our lives, " See what an indulgent

and gracious being I am: and come to a resolution no longer to abuse so generous a friend." This hath been the language of every affliction. "Know by experience the strength of my hand, and the weakness of thy feeble nature; and come to a resolution no longer to resist and provoke so unequal an enemy." And let your consciences say, whether to this voice of Providence he hath not sometimes joined that of his Spirit, in gentle whispers pleading with your souls *to-day, while it is called to-day* to hear his voice; and not to *harden your heart, and reject the counsel of God against yourselves*, to your final condemnation and destruction. It is surely a great aggravation of your folly in continuing undetermined about so clear a case, that you have had such full opportunities to know it, and such repeated and solemn calls to attend it.

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3. Consider how long you have continued in this irresolute state, in the midst of all these great advantages.

This is a thought often suggested in scripture. *How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity*[3]*?* and here in my text, *How long halt ye between two opinions?* One would

[3] Prov. i. 22.

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think a week, or a day, might be long enough to determine whether God or the creature be more excellent; whether a mortal life on earth, and the transient enjoyments of it, or a glorious eternity be the more desirable; but you have been practically unresolved, I will not say merely days and weeks, but for months and years: and, alas! how many! It may be, some of you were informed of these things, and brought under some impression by them, ten or twenty, nay, possibly I may add, thirty or forty years ago; and are not yet come to a steady resolution concerning them, but are still in a manner where you were all that while since. With all these plain convincing arguments before you, with the word of God in your hand, the Providence of God continually working before you, yea, and the Spirit of God too in some degree working on your heart; you have taken more time to determine so plain a case than would have been requisite for making yourselves masters of the niceties of foreign languages, or the depths of abstruse sciences: and, perhaps, many that were born long after you have learned these; and you have not learned the most obvious lessons

which are written as with a sun-beam wherever you turn your eyes, and which have been inculcated upon you until you are weary of hearing them. Every moment of irresolution, in such circumstances as these, is, undoubtedly, an aggravation of the folly and the crime. Thus much for those arguments which are taken from the nature and circumstances of that affair which you are undetermined about. I now proceed, SERM. V.

2. To argue the folly of this irresolution from the consequences which do and may, yea, and must attend it.

Now this argument will consist of two branches. You can propose no considerable advantage from it, and you run the most dreadful hazard by it. A few words will abundantly demonstrate each of these assertions. Hear the proof, and seriously think what you can say to oppose it.

1. It is a foolish thing to continue in this irresolute state, for you can expect no considerable advantage from it.

The terms of acceptance with God will not become less necessary or more easy, nor will you in the mean time find any ease and composure of mind while you continue to hesitate about them.

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1. The service of God and the care of your souls will not become less necessary in consequence of your delay.

You are now immortal creatures, hastening forward to an unalterable eternity, and the happiness or misery of that eternity depends upon the favour or displeasure of God. You are not yet resolved whether you shall attend to this great affair. Well, if you continue in this irresolution a year longer, you will still be immortal beings; God will still be your Governor and your Judge. You will not have outgrown your obligations to religion; no, but the necessity of it will be as great as now, and the urgency of it proportionably greater, as you are advanced on your way to eternity. Your obligation results from the unalterable nature and constitution of things, and while God is God, and you are creatures, you must be his, or you must be miserable. But,

2. Your irresolution can be no advantage to you, because God will make no abatement in his demands, and they cannot grow any more easy to you than they now are.

He now requires you to repent of your sins, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to set yourselves to the practice of the

whole course of duties which he hath described in his word. This he requires of all to whom the gospel comes, ever since the first publication of it: this he hath required of you from your youth up, and if you persist in your refusal, it alters not the case. He will still persist in his demand, and you must find mercy on these terms, or you must perish. He hath already chosen to see the final and eternal ruin of millions of men rather than to reverse these laws and change the constitution of this covenant; and he will see your ruin likewise, were you ever so great, and learned, and honourable, much rather than he will violate it for your deliverance. What are you, sinners, or ten thousand greater and better than you, that for you the earth should be removed out of its place, nay, that for you the infinitely more stable foundations of the divine justice, and holiness, and veracity should be overthrown, and that righteousness should now begin to have fellowship with unrighteousness, or light to have communion with darkness.

God will not abate his present demands; and are you foolish enough to imagine that by a longer delay you shall outgrow your

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disinclination to a compliance with them. Will evil habits be conquered by indulgence, or the small remainder of good inclinations be strengthened by being overborne, or the influences of divine grace be invited by resistance, or secured by a continued abuse? Or do you find that this effect has been produced by former delays, and that you are better disposed toward religion now than you were when you were some years younger, and had known less of the ways of sin by experience than now.

Conscience, and common sense, and reason will answer the contrary to all this; but I believe, if one could look into your heart, it would be found there is this one thought artfully folded up as in the very centre of it, perhaps so veiled and disguised that you have yourselves hardly attended to it. I mean that the religion will not grow less necessary or more easy by the delay, yet you shall gain by it in this respect at least, that you shall be more at liberty from the restraints of religion for a while, though you must submit to them at last, and shall spare yourselves some of the labours and self-denials which an immediate repentance and conver-

sion would require. Let me, therefore, in answer to that, lead you to reflect, SERM. V.

3. That while you continue in this unsettled state, your minds can find no solid ease and composure, but must continue in a painful and disagreeable situation.

He that wavereth, says St. James, *is like a wave of the sea tossed before the wind*, and foaming and swelling, and often dashing and breaking itself against shores and rocks. As for that true serenity of mind which arises from a determinate resolution of soul to follow the Lord fully, it is plain that in present circumstances there can be no room for that; and, which is the thought I now principally intend, while you are thus unresolved, you will find but little pleasure in a sinful course. While you have these things under consideration, it is plain that your consciences are not entirely seared, and the Spirit of God hath not utterly forsaken you. Now, will not the remonstrances of conscience, and the pleadings of the Spirit of God, while they yet continue to work against your corrupt inclination, occasion a perpetual uneasiness? Sinners! I appeal to your own experience, are you now easy? Are you not galled and

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disturbed under the preaching of the word, when the minister is plainly and affectionately addressing himself to you, and setting your sin and your danger in order before your face? Even while I am now speaking, do you not as it were bleed inwardly? Does not your heart smite you, so that it is a vexation to you to hear what I am saying, and you wish yourself absent from the place? Why, this is an uneasiness that often occurs, and, if God continue our lives, will occur again and again. Yes, sirs! by the help of God, you shall have it repeated over and over. While I have a voice to speak amongst you, *I will lift it up as a trumpet*, to give you the alarm, and when I can speak to you no more, God will raise up others to plead the same cause, and, if grace or vengeance does not make a change in your state, to give you the very same distress. Nor is your uneasiness confined to the places and seasons of public worship. The scripture, and other practical and awakening books, will sometimes come in your way; death will sometimes work around you in the sickness, the removal, the funerals, of others; yea, and it will sometimes work within you too in the

disorders of this animal frame, which are the sure forerunners of its dissolution. And these circumstances do and will shock you. Even when you attempt to close your eyelids, these vibrations of God's flaming sword will dart a beam through them, which will strike on the clouded sense, and have force enough at least to disturb, if not to reform you. And thus you will lose even that poor pleasure which more resolved sinners may find in their evil ways. So that I may say with Elijah in the words of my text, *If Baal be God, serve him.* If you can answer it to your own reason and conscience, to give up all thoughts of religion at once, it is better to do it than to entertain these partial and desultory regards to it, which only destroy your present peace, not to prevent, but even to aggravate your future misery. SERM. V.

These considerations have, I hope, convinced you that you can expect no considerable advantage from your irresolution; I shall surely have demonstrated the folly and mischief of it; therefore if in conjunction with the former head I can prove,

2. That you will run a most dreadful hazard by it, such a hazard that I am sure

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no wise man would venture it on any imaginable advantages, were they ten thousand times greater than the most prosperous and undisturbed course of sin could promise.

To prove this, I beseech you to extend your views, and consider what the end of these things will be; and you will surely see that on the one hand, if God hath any thoughts of mercy and love towards you, he will bring you to resolution by some very painful way, or, on the other hand, that he may let loose his hand against you, and either seal you up under final hardness and impenitence of heart, or cut you off by an immediate stroke, and either way the certain consequence must be your eternal ruin.

1. If God have any thoughts of mercy and love towards you, it is very probable that he may bring you to a determination by some very painful method either in the operations of his providence or his grace.

I believe it hath very often been observed that when young persons, who have enjoyed the benefits of a religious education, and have been early brought under serious impressions, suffer them to wear off, and rest in any thing short of a real conversion to God,

which, with respect to such, is generally this irresolute state; if they are ever brought home to God at all, it is with some peculiar terror and aggravated distress, either of soul or body. It may perhaps be thus with you. Some dreadful distemper may have a commission to invade you, so that you may be chastened with pain on your bed, and the multitude of your bones with strong pain. You may sit confined in a chamber of weakness, or be disabled for weeks and months together, to give you time to think over those plain important things which you will not now be prevailed upon to consider. God may blast you in your worldly affairs, and empty you from vessel to vessel, so that those gifts of providence, which you now pervert, may cease, and, like the prodigal, you may think of returning to your father when you are almost perishing for want. Nor let any imagine their mountain stands so strong that they can never be in such adversity as this. Or God may wither the dearest of your creature comforts, by taking away, by some sudden calamitous stroke, those relatives and friends which are the delight of your eyes and the joy of your hearts, and at the same

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time, while you are mourning over your dust, may write still bitterer things against you, and declare himself an enemy to your souls. The arrows of his wrath may be discharged against you, and the poison of them may even drink up your spirits. The awful eternity which you now think so slightly of may appear as a scene of infinite horror; a flaming gulf just ready to swallow you up, and Satan may be permitted so to terrify you that, while you suffer it, you may be almost distracted, and be made a spectacle of dread to others as well as a burthen to yourselves. It is true, my friends! if by such severe methods as these you be delivered from eternal ruin, and plucked as brands out of everlasting burnings, there will, on the whole, be matter of abundant praise; but why should you as it were force your heavenly Father to chastise you with such severity when he is waiting to be gracious to you, and would rather draw you with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love? Surely when you feel the heavy pressure of such calamities as these, you will be ready to wish that you had learnt wisdom at an easier rate. Yet who can on the whole promise that it

shall end so well? It is surely in the nature of things much more probable that,

2. Your irresolution may end in your everlasting condemnation, as God may hereby be provoked to give you up to hardness and impenitence of heart; or to cut you off by some stroke of immediate vengeance.

3. You may by your irresolution provoke God finally to withdraw his Spirit from you, and so to give you up to hardness and impenitence.

You know what he said with regard to the old world, and what if he should say the same with respect to you? *My spirit shall not always strive with men.* And concerning the Israelites, after long delay, and many years and ages of patience and mercy, when, after all, they continued incorrigible, *Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone. He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.* What if God should pronounce such dreadful words concerning you. Alas, sinners! you know not the dreadful consequences. From that moment you would be sealed up under a curse, and it would be but a little matter what your advantages or your enjoyments in life were. Melting ordinances or awakening providences

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would break upon you as waters on a rock. They would be utterly unable to make any impression, but would all be added to the account, and inflame the final reckoning.

You must own that this is a possible case, and after all your abuses of the means of grace, you must own that God would be just, were it to be yours; and really I am afraid it is already thus with regard to some of you. I have seen so many instances of persons who once appeared hopeful, whose *hearts have been* afterwards *hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*, that I tremble lest they be already rejected by God. But as we know not certainly that they are, it is our duty to repeat the admonition, and I would entreat young ones to look upon those that seem most probably instances of this kind, that they may learn instruction from them, and fear lest they also be hardened through the same example of unbelief and impenitence. Tremble, oh thou stupid sinner! lest it should be thy case; awake, and call upon God.

2. But perhaps, if you go on in this irresolute state, God may resolve to cut you off immediately by the stroke of death, and so bring the whole deliberation to an end.

God hath forborne you, sirs, a considerable time; and continued you in life when you have lived only to neglect and despise him. And who knows, but his patience may be now almost wearied out, and the glass turned at the end of which all the artillery of his wrath may be discharged upon you, to batter and destroy all your hopes and comforts, and lay you low in flaming ruin? Who knows but this large and particular address which I am now making to you, may close the scene; so that the next time God speaks to you may be in thunder? Is there one amongst you that will take upon him to answer for it, that he shall not be fixed in an eternal state before the next Sabbath? And what, if this should be the case, and you should die as you have lived, where would that end? oh! my friend, I tremble to think of it. God would not, for one moment, be undetermined as to the abode to which he should consign you. Should this be the case, then, while we that might survive were perhaps met in the house of God the next Lord's-day, you would then be in hell, recollecting at leisure all these reasonings; which would then, no doubt, be fresh

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in your memory, and instamped as it were in burning characters on your very hearts. "Stupid idiot that I was," will you then say, "that I could not come to a determination till these flames enlightened me! What, could I not tell whether all this horror and misery were to be avoided, rather than a few days of mortification, and some degrees of temporal inconvenience, which wisdom and fortitude would easily have supported; and, perhaps, turned into pleasure and triumph? Could I not tell whether all that bliss and glory which I have for ever lost, and which my despairing eyes now behold at this unapproachable distance, were better than the perishing vanities of time and sense, which have now for ever forsaken me, and serve only by the anguish of a sad remembrance, to pour oil on these unquenchable burnings? Oh that God would try me once more! Oh that the precious neglected season of deliberation might yet be continued, if it were but for a week, for a day, for an hour, for a moment longer! How would my soul spring forward to seize it! But, alas! it is gone, irrecoverably gone; and here is an eternity to be spent in bewailing it." We are ready

to think such as this will be the language of trifling sinners, when they see themselves condemned and undone. But, surely, such language is faint and cold, when compared with that of the infernal world. May you never know it by experience, but assure yourselves that you are in danger of it every hour; and, while you thus *halt between two opinions*, may stumble unawares into this pit of destruction: and if the danger of that will not prove the folly of delay and irresolution, then folly and wisdom, and danger and safety, and happiness and misery, are empty names.

I have done with this various and important argument, and I am confident that most, or all of you, are in your consciences convinced that the conclusion is unanswerably strong. It only remains that,

II. I conclude with a word of more particular application,

Which will be included in these two particulars.

Let the irresolute remember, that in consequence of this discourse, their affairs are grown yet more urgent than before; and let

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others with pleasure reflect on the resolutions which, by Divine Grace, they have formed for God, and renew them with increasing vigour.

1. Let the irresolute remember, that in consequence of this discourse, their affairs are grown more urgent than before.

I am very sorry to say it, but so it is, that public ordinances are grown but mere matters of amusement, even with many that pretty constantly attend them. One would suppose the question were only this, how elegantly the hearers could dress, and how agreeably the preacher could harangue them. But, how widely distant is this from the purpose of such sacred institutions. Assure yourselves, my friends! it will be found that the question of this day is, "Whether you should continue unresolved and wavering between God and those idols which would alienate your heart from him?" Your immediate business, therefore, is to consider and determine that. With what accent and manner, in what language and dress the case hath been stated, is a trifle. The grand debate is this, "Have I proved the folly and mischief of irresolution, or not?" Many

arguments I have produced. In what article do they fail? What is to be opposed to them? State your objections against these things. Bring them to your minister, or any other Christian friend, that they may be examined. But you think that would be foolish and absurd. If you heard of a book entitled "A Demonstration of the Wisdom and Safety of Irresolution in Matters of Practical Religion on the Principles of Christianity;" reason would think it as strange, wild, and as monstrous a thing as, "A Demonstration of the Pleasure of Pain." And yet, you act as if it were very rational; and suffer acknowledged nonsense and folly to outweigh all that reason and scripture can urge against it. Sirs, I beseech you to consider, that the blessed God is now present amongst us. He hears the address I am now making. He sees every secret conviction that arises in your mind. And he also, at this moment, sees the consternation and despair of multitudes, that but a few days ago were in your case, and are now undone by the very temper which you are carrying away with you from such an ordinance as this. I fear it will end there with you like-

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wise; and I appeal to your own consciences to judge even against yourselves, whether every such representation of the case must not increase your danger, if you will not improve it as, through Divine Grace, the means of preventing your ruin. But if, after all, you will turn the appointed remedy into poison, in the midst of all the grief that such a thought must give, I shall, at least, have the comfort of thinking that He, in whose name and presence I speak, will witness that I pleaded his cause in the integrity of my heart; and have not betrayed your souls by my silence, or the coldness of my address.

2. Let those who are, by Divine Grace, determined for God, reflect on their resolutions with pleasure and thankfulness, and renew them with increasing vigour.

The folly and danger of a contrary temper was once your own, and methinks, when you review it in such a representation as this, you should reflect: And why is it not still so? Are there not multitudes in this sad state, whose genius and abilities are much greater than ours; and their opportunities of information at least equal? Did we not speculatively know all these things long

before we felt the power and energy of them on our hearts; and whence was it that we at last felt it. Lord! should each of us say, we adore that grace that, at length, turned the scales; that, unequal as the weights were, so long hovered in uncertainty, and rectified *these balances of deceit* in which we were poising the lightest vanity against matters of everlasting moment. Otherwise, the sword of Divine wrath might, ere this time, have been drawn against us; and have *mingled our blood with the sacrifices* which we were presenting to those idols, by which we were so long *provoking the Lord to jealousy.*

The bias of our hearts is now, by Divine Grace, fixed for God; but are we not, in too many instances, obstructed and diverted in our course towards him. If the temple and altar of Baal be destroyed, do we not sometimes take pleasure in the stones, and favour the dust thereof? *Suffer*, therefore, my brethren! *the word of exhortation*, that, *with full purpose of heart ye cleave unto the Lord;* and that, if Jehovah be indeed God, ye serve him. This day let us renew the entire consecration of our souls to him, and every day let us be saying to the Lord, *thou art our*

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Lord; and, whatever others do, with Caleb and Joshua let us follow him fully, unallured by any of the deceitful charms of the world, and undismayed by any of its terrors.

Now, may that *God who hath called you to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, and settle you;* that you may not only so hold out to the end as to receive the end of your faith in the salvation of your souls; but may press forward with such zeal and dispatch in this holy way, and give such diligence to improve in every virtue and grace, that an abundant entrance may be administered to you into his heavenly kingdom. There Baal shall no more either seduce your hearts, or vex your eyes; but you shall be fixed, as pillars in the temple of your God, and for ever surrounded with innumerable multitudes of his most faithful and affectionate servants. Amen.

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MEPHIBOSHETH'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF DAVID'S FAVOURS.

2 SAMUEL, ix. 8.

And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?

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OUR Lord delivered it as a maxim of most certain truth and universal importance, that *he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*[1]: a maxim, which it is peculiarly reasonable for us to recollect, when we are making our most intimate approaches to God. When he proclaims himself by his most awful and majestic titles; as *the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity*, that *dwelleth in the high and holy place*[2]; and he is graciously pleased to add, *to that man also will I look who is humble, and of a contrite spirit;* and *who trembleth at my word, &c.* And, whether we reflect on those discourses we have lately heard concerning communion with God, as

[1] Luke xiv. 11.

[2] Isaiah lvii. 15.

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the honour and happiness of the pious soul; or look forward to that solemn ordinance to which we are this day approaching, and in which we hope delightfully to exercise that communion; I am sure that the greatest humility well becomes us, and that it is most highly reasonable and decent that we should bow ourselves in the presence of our God, and say, "*O Lord, what are thy servants that thou shouldest look on such worthless creatures as we are?*"

The story of which these words are a part, will, I think, afford matter for several reflections; which, by the Divine blessing, may be useful to us on these occasions. I shall, therefore,

I. Take a brief survey of the story.

II. Consider the devotional improvement we may properly make of it.

III. Draw some inferences from that improvement. May they answer their proper end! and may God humble us by the hand of his grace, and so raise us in the arms of his love!

I. I am to give you a brief survey of the story, so far as is necessary to acquaint you

with the occasion of these words of Mephibosheth to David. And the substance of it is this. SERM. VI.

David, after a long course of persecution and danger, was now raised to the throne of Israel, and fixed there. The enemies of God's people, alarmed by the accession of so considerable a prince, had united their efforts against him. *The heathen had raged*, and *the people imagined a vain thing*, saying, *Let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us.* Potent alliances had been formed against him in neighbouring nations; but God was with him, and *whithersoever he went, he prospered;* and, at length, we are told that *God had given David rest from all his enemies round about*[3]; and then it was that he recollected the friendship that had been between him and Jonathan, and inquired whether there were any remaining branches of his family. [3] 2 Sam. vii. 1.

It was pity that he inquired no sooner; for this young prince of whom he now heard was, as it seems, old enough now to have a son[4], though at the death of his father he was but a child in arms; so that there must have been at least fourteen or fifteen years between [4] verse 12.

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David's accession and Mephibosheth's preferment. Prosperity is too apt to make men forget themselves, and their friends too; but it must be better to remember them something too late than not at all; if a duty has long been deferred, there is so much the more need that it be immediately and resolutely attended to. David accordingly now made the inquiry, and he heard that there was one son of Jonathan in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, at Lodebar. He therefore sent to fetch him from thence; and poor Mephibosheth perhaps, not knowing the covenant of the Lord which there had been between David and Jonathan, though he must have heard something of their friendship, seems to have been thrown into great consternation; and so much the more as he had been brought up in a private manner, and not used to the courts of princes. This is plainly implied when David says to him, *Fear not.* And, methinks, his confusion on this occasion is an emblem of that which the soul sometimes feels when God takes hold of it by his grace to bring it home to himself. God means very graciously in the thing, intends to adopt it into his family, to raise it

to the privilege and inheritance of a child; but the soul trembles and fears. It knows not what will become of it, and its own meanness and guilt rather suggest some gloomy apprehensions. David, however, soon took care to dissipate the fears of Mephibosheth; and addresses him in the words of the context, *Fear not, for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father, and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.*

For understanding this more perfectly, you will please to recollect that Mephibosheth, having had an unhappy fall from his nurse's arms, when she fled in that dreadful day of his father's death, was lame in both his feet.

This, together with his infancy, made the adherents of the house of Saul think it proper to set him aside, though he were the next heir to the crown, in favour of his uncle Ishbosheth, whom they made king at Mahanaim. And indeed, upon the whole, this calamity proved a happiness to him: had he been crowned, as his uncle was, he might at last perhaps have been assassinated, as that poor prince was many years before this time. We are often much indebted to the kind provi-

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dence of God for our disappointments; for he frequently keeps us low, that he may keep us safe. Upon the rebellion of Ishbosheth, for such it was, and the entire suppression of his faction, it is exceeding probable that the estate of Saul had been confiscated to the crown; but David on this occasion restores it to Mephibosheth again. *I will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father*, or, thy grandfather, for so the word plainly signifies here; and to this he adds, *Thou shalt eat bread at my table continually;* q. d. "I will assign thee an apartment in my court, where thou shalt share in all the dignity and pleasure of it, and shalt always be heartily welcome to my table, and thou and thy family shalt be maintained at my expense;" so that much of the revenue of the father's estate might, to be sure, be laid up for the next generation, who might not be secure of equal favour. This was very generous conduct. One cannot but read the story with pleasure, and must own that to do good to others, especially to our friends, or their children, is one of the greatest pleasures that prosperity, and power, and riches can afford.

On the other hand, it is very agreeable to

observe in what a respectful and humble manner this favour was received by Mephibosheth. *He bowed*, or prostrated himself upon the ground, as the word often signifies, *and he said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldst so much as look upon such a dead dog as I am*, on so contemptible a creature? A dog was an unclean animal; it might not be sacrificed to God, nor might even the price of its redemption, like that of a horse or other animals which might not be sacrificed, be brought into the congregation of the Lord. The carcass of a dog must therefore be much more abominable: accordingly we find it used as a proverbial expression, to signify a most despicable creature. Thus David says, *Does the king of Israel pursue after a dead dog, after a flea*[5]? And Abishai, speaking to David of Shimei, *Wherefore should that dead dog curse my lord the king*[6]? And Abner used it to Ishbosheth, when he thought he had treated him in an unworthy manner: *Am I a dog's head; the skull of a dead dog*[7]? Such was the import of that strong phrase which Mephibosheth, in his humility, here used to express the sense he had of his own unworthiness; perhaps in part referring to

[5] 1 Sam. xxiv. 14.

[6] 2 Sam. xvi. 9.

[7] 2 Sam. iii. 8.

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the poor and ungraceful figure that he must make upon account of his lameness; though it had been very unworthy so generous a spirit as David's to have treated him the less kindly on that account. I have now opened the story; give me leave,

II. To direct you to the practical improvement of it, and it centres in this point; If Mephibosheth received these favours of David in so humble and so respectful a manner, then how much greater reason have we to humble ourselves in the Divine presence, and prostrate our souls before him in a tender acknowledgment of our own unworthiness of such an honour as conversing with him, and especially of approaching to him at his table [to which we are this day invited]. What just cause to bow ourselves, and say, *Who are thy servants, that thou shouldst look on such dead dogs*, on such contemptible creatures, *as we?* It would be happy for us if we could attain this temper; it would be very decent and very pleasant; it would dispose us for further intercourse with him, and prepare us to receive his favours. Give me leave then to show you a little more particularly how

much more reason there is for such humility of soul in us, when we stand before God or sit down at his table, than there was in Mephibosheth when he stood before David. And this will abundantly appear, if you more particularly consider how much greater a favour is conferred upon us, and how much less reason we had to expect it.

I. Consider how much greater a favour is conferred upon us than David conferred on Mephibosheth. He was invited to David's table, he was restored to his paternal estate; but God gives us much nobler entertainment; he adopts us to a much more valuable inheritance.

1. Are we not, indeed, invited to much better entertainment? Raise your thoughts of the magnificence and elegance of the court of David as high as you please; suppose it, which yet to be sure it was not, suppose it, I say, equal to that of Solomon his son, of which we have so large an account in the first of Kings; can you possibly think that the pleasures of it were equal to the pleasures of communion with God through Christ? I am sure, if you can, you know nothing at all

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of these pleasures. David judged very differently of them: *My soul*, says he, *shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips*[8]. *Thy words are sweet to my soul, yea, sweeter than honey to my taste*[9]. How much more delightful was it then, when he saw God's beauty and his glory, so as he had seen it in the sanctuary, which made him speak of it *as the one thing which he desired of the Lord*[1], and which he would seek after. And what then would he have said if he had enjoyed our privileges! what would he have said if he had been invited to the table of the Lord, and there seen *the Lord Jesus Christ as evidently set forth, crucified amongst us!* Surely then he would have tuned some sublimer psalm of praise than the distant views of that great Deliverer ever taught him; yet this is our privilege. He gives us *his flesh, which is meat indeed, and his blood, which is drink indeed;* and he says, *Eat, eat, O my friends! drink, yea, drink abundantly, O my beloved!* And do you think a meal at the table of a prince would be better than this? Forbid it, O Lord, that I should ever entertain so vile a thought! Christians! would you exchange

[8] Psa. lxiii. 5.

[9] Psa. cxix. 103.

[1] Ps. xxvii. 4.

them? Would you accept of a place at the most sumptuous and delightful table, where there was, I will not say merely the most delicious food, but, which is abundantly more, the most elegant and entertaining converse with persons of the most refined sense and education, upon those terms that you should come no more to the table of the Lord; that you should converse no more with him? I am sure, if you are Christians indeed, you would abhor it; and would rather choose a dinner of herbs, or bread and water. To regale the senses; to amuse the imagination; to be strongly tempted, and, perhaps, sometimes prevailed upon to overburden nature, and abuse the bounties of Providence; is this better than to converse with God? is it sweeter in the enjoyment? is it more pleasing in the reflection? If it be not, then in this respect, your cause for thankfulness is greater than that which Mephibosheth had.

2. Are not we adopted to a much nobler inheritance?

David gave to Mephibosheth the estate of his father Saul, which, no doubt, was considerable; for we are told, when his name is first mentioned, that Kish his father *was a*

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mighty man of power, i. e. as it seems by the story, a person of great possessions, and, therefore, eminent in his tribe. And to a person who had for a great many years together subsisted upon the generosity of a country gentleman, which was the case with Mephibosheth, as a kind of pensioner at his table, this must appear a noble gift; and so much the rather as it placed him in something of independent circumstances, in case David should die, and *another king arise who knew not* Jonathan. But how much more noble is the gift which God bestows upon us! David did not set a crown on the head of Mephibosheth; did not assign him a region in Israel, and establish his throne over it: but, as little a flock as believers may now seem, and as contemptible a figure as they now make, *it is their Father's good pleasure to give them a kingdom:* and such a kingdom, that all the kingdoms of the earth are but poor despicable trifles when compared with it. Had Christ only restored to us the inheritance of our father Adam, which was so fair and noble, it would have claimed our humblest acknowledgments. Suppose, I say, that the scheme of his appearance had been to

restore the paradisaical state, to replant Eden again, to sheath the flaming sword of the cherub that guarded it, and to procure to his followers a readmission into it on the same terms on which Adam held it; surely this scheme had been incomparably greater than that which the Jews were so fond of, I mean that of a temporal Messiah, as it would have carried in it a restoration to holiness and immortality, as well as joy: but, blessed be God! this was not the most that our blessed Redeemer intended: he came to purchase a heavenly kingdom for us, and we are adopted to that inheritance. And is it not far more valuable? What if it were now to be proposed to Abraham, or David, or Paul, or John, that they should exchange the glories which they now possess, and much more those which they expect after the resurrection, for the entertainments of Eden, and the original state of Adam? Do you think that they would accept it? Would Adam be willing on these terms to possess his former inheritance again, and leave the society of angels, among whom he is now incorporated, to be an inhabitant of earth in its fairest form? Surely he would not; even though he were to be confirmed in

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a terrestrial happiness beyond the possibility of losing it. Yet to this inheritance we are adopted; *begotten again*, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, *to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*[1]. "And, Lord! art thou giving me this? Dost thou now give me the promise of it, and seal that promise at thy table, and encourage me to hope that when a few mortal days are passed over my head, thou wilt receive me to it? for ever adored be the riches of thy grace!" *Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us*, that in that view, and to such a degree, we should be called the sons of God! Surely we have reason to prostrate ourselves before him, and say, *What are thy servants, that thou shouldst look on such dead dogs as we are?* especially if we further consider,

[1] 1 Peter i. 3.

II. How much less reason we had to expect such a favour from God, than Mephibosheth from David.

Mephibosheth was David's fellow-creature; we are the creatures of God, and, therefore, at an infinite distance from him: Mephibosheth was the son of David's most

generous and obliging friend; we are the children of transgressors: Mephibosheth had always behaved well towards David; but we, by an ungrateful rebellion against God, have rendered ourselves worthy of his wrath rather than of his favour. Let us attend a little to each of these thoughts.

We are here surveying the kindness of one creature to another.

Mephibosheth and David were both partners in the same human nature: and, indeed, if a comparison were to be made, Mephibosheth was by birth his superior, as being the son of a prince; and by blood, heir-apparent to the crown. And though all right were transferred to David by a divine donation, yet some respect was owing to Mephibosheth for the former dignity of his family; especially from David, who was *taken from following the ewes great with young*. And if David thought, that after his late victory, and in his present establishment, *his mountain stood so strong that it might never be moved;* if he imagined he might never come into circumstances to need the kindness he now showed, he forgot the precarious state of human nature, and learned to know it better

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at his cost. For some years after this, he was driven out of his kingdom, a helpless fugitive, by the rebellion of Absalom; and, which is very remarkable, he was forced in part to cast himself upon the hospitality of Machir, at Lodebar! the generous man by whom Mephibosheth had been maintained in his younger years: and, perhaps, David might meet with a heartier welcome there, for his kindness to one who had been Machir's guest. But these are not the conditions on which the blessed God bestows his favours upon us. He is our creator, we his dependant creatures. He is the exalted Sovereign of universal nature, and the difference between a prince and a slave, is to him but like that between one grasshopper and another, one atom and another. Thus we are led to view the matter, when we are told, that *he sits upon the circle of the heavens, and the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers before him: and all nations are as the drop of the bucket, and as the small dust of the balance*[3]. No revolution can disturb his government, and reduce him to circumstances to need the gratitude or kindness of his creatures; nor will that moment ever

[3] Isa. xl. 15.

come through eternal ages, in which any of the greatest of them shall be able to say, that his goodness extendeth unto God. All these favours, therefore, are the riches of his overflowing grace; and, it becomes us to adore that condescension in him, which the mightiest princes on earth, or in heaven, are not able to imitate.

Again, Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan, David's friend; but we are the children of rebellious parents. One can hardly imagine one friend more obliging to another, than Jonathan had been to David. In token of his affection to him, when their friendship was first formed, Jonathan had stripped himself of all his princely habit, even to his sword and his bow, to clothe his beloved David with them; when he appeared in a plain dress of a shepherd. David, himself, owned that his love to him was wonderful, passing the love even of the tenderer sex; to whose endearment David was not a stranger, having been tenderly beloved by the sister of Jonathan; and, perhaps, by Jonathan's means, assisted in obtaining her. At least, we are sure that Jonathan had ventured his life to defend David's character

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against his enraged father; and had preserved David's life by the timely notice he gave him of his danger, and that he had actually stipulated to have resigned the crown to him, had its hereditary right devolved upon him. In short, there was such a stock of merit, that we are rather surprised that David could forget the family of Jonathan so long, than that he should now treat his son so kindly. But can we pretend any such claim to the divine favour? let us remember *the rock from whence we were hewn, and the pit from whence we were digged.*

Were not our first parents rebels against God? and did they not entail a curse upon their posterity? Shall a child of Adam say, "Lord I have a title to thy favour for my father's sake?" And if we think of our immediate ancestors, perhaps some of you can say, and make the reflection with deep sorrow, "Lord, we are the children of strangers, our fathers knew thee not, and served thee not; they did not train us up in thy fear and service; but thou hast stepped out of the usual way of thy providence to reduce us to thyself." And as for those of us that have had pious parents, and can, perhaps, trace

the honourable line to two or three distant generations; (and few can go farther than that,) alas! what made them to differ from others, but the grace of God? Once, at least, they were foolish and disobedient; and in this respect, we, and our family, have been but the more indebted to Divine goodness. Our pious parents arrogated nothing to themselves; they humbly acknowledged that *by grace they were saved*, and that they had never deserved the least favour for themselves, or for us. Who then are we, that on their account God should look upon us?

Once more, Mephibosheth had, so far as we can learn, always behaved well towards David: but we have forfeited the Divine favour in a thousand aggravated instances.

We never read that Mephibosheth had made any pretensions to the kingdom, or done any thing to disturb the quiet of David's government. He seems a very peaceable man, and afterwards expressed a very tender affection for David, even when he had indeed done him a great injury by the confiscation of his estate; in short, he seems to have inherited the heart of his father Jonathan, with regard to David, so

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that it had been great cruelty to have used him with severity. If David had conquered Ishbosheth, and taken him prisoner; and not only spared his life, but taken him into favour, given him a seat at his table, and restored his inheritance: that, methinks, had been a more proper emblem of the manner in which God has treated us: for we must own that we have been audacious rebels to his authority, with this aggravated circumstance, that we have been so after so many favours; so that it is rather, as if Mephibosheth, after such kind treatment, had indeed revolted, as Ziba falsely accused him. "Lord," may we each of us justly say, "instead of putting *a cup of blessing* into my hand, thou mightest have given me *a cup of trembling:* instead of assigning me such an inheritance, I might have had my *portion in the lake of unquenchable burning:* for, though thou hast pardoned me, thou hast entertained me, thou hast adopted me; yet I have renewed my provocations; and dost thou yet say unto me, when I come trembling and weeping before thee, dost thou yet say *fear not?* dost thou this day invite me to eat bread at thy table again?

Oh! *what is thy servant indeed, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am!* SERM. VI.

III. I have not time now to enlarge in the application of these things, and in the inferences we may draw from them. Such as these will no doubt occur to your thoughts.

1. What shameful ingratitude must it be, to slight such favours! what ingratitude in the sinner that will not accept of gospel grace! If a prince would give you a place at his table, and an estate, though it might, perhaps, serve for little more than to answer the extraordinary expense of such a life, perhaps many would very greedily embrace it. But, the entertainments of Divine love, and the glory of the heavenly world, are neglected; neglected, I fear, by many of you. God grant you may not see your error too late! God grant you may not, with Esau, when he had sold and lost his birthright, be *seeking a place for repentance in vain, though you seek it with tears!* And if my time would allow me, I would here address myself to sincere Christians, that live in the neglect of the Lord's supper; and ask them, Why do you not accept of the invita-

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tion which Christ gives you to his table? It would have looked unkind and ungrateful in Mephibosheth, if, out of a proud kind of humility, he had refused to come and eat bread with David on so kind an invitation: the indecency is yours, while you neglect that ordinance. Let me ask you seriously, do you not desire it? if you do, in what views do you desire it? that you may enjoy communion with Christ? that you may be ripened for heaven? if so, dismiss your fears, for these desires prove your right to it; if they operate strongly on your souls, if you act as those that feel such desires in your hearts.

2. Learn with what temper we should prepare for our most intimate approach to God, and attend him in this approach.

With high thoughts of the value of the favour; with a deep sense of our own unworthiness, reflecting on the particular instances and circumstances that render us unworthy; and yet not arguing ourselves into unbelieving and overwhelming sorrow; but bowing down our souls with pleasing admiration, acquiescing in the promises of Divine grace to us, and saying at once, with the humility

and faith of the blessed virgin, *Behold the handmaid*, or servant, *of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word*[4]! SERM. VI.

[4] Luke i. 38.

3. A sense of this unmerited favour should dispose us patiently to submit to the afflictive dispensations of this gracious and generous hand.

It is remarkable, that when Mephibosheth had been falsely accused to David, and David, in the disorder of his spirit, or in those sad circumstances in which he then was, had pronounced a very hard sentence upon him, that his estate should be taken away and given to his servant; when he afterwards met David in the habit of a very deep mourner, after a remarkably modest defence of himself, he concludes his apology thus: *All my father's house were but dead men before my lord, the king! yet thou didst set thy servant among them that eat at thine own table: what right have I yet to cry any more unto my lord, the king?*"

Christians! we have a thousand times more reason to say it. *We were all but dead men before* God, and he gave us our all; and set us at his table: and shall we, in a complaining way, cry to him as if he did us

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wrong when he takes away from us something which he has given, or withholds something which we fondly imagine that we want? it would ill become us. Let us think of our privileges on the one hand, and our demerit on the other, and our mouths will only be open to bless him in the most afflicted circumstances we can meet within life.

4. Favours which should be received with so much admiration, should certainly be improved with a becoming care. Has God given us such privileges? let us use them for him. Has he called us to attend upon his table? never let it be said, that, though we *have eaten of his bread, we have lift up our heel against him.* Let us remember, that we have been at his table, and remember that we expect to visit him at it again: for, in this respect, the resemblance holds, we are not invited to make one single visit, but *to dwell in the house of the Lord, and eat bread continually with him.* And let us further remember that we expect, ere long, to be removed to a nobler apartment, and to get better entertainment. Our Lord now spreads his table on earth; he will shortly spread it in heaven. Happy are they, in-

deed, that shall in that sense eat bread in the kingdom of God! We hope, through grace, to do it. Let the hope not only revive, but admonish us to behave in a manner answerable to it. And, surely, when that blessed day comes, when we see the heavenly banquet spread, and look round us on the glory of the Redeemer's courts above, intended for our everlasting abode, in proportion to the degree in which our wonder and our joy arises, our souls will sink in the profoundest humility; we shall prostrate ourselves at his feet, and say, with deeper abasement of soul than we have ever yet known, amidst all the infirmities of this mortal life, *Lord, what are thy servants that thou shouldest look on such worthless creatures as we are!*

SERMON VII.

THE SUBJECT, MANNER, AND END OF PAUL'S PREACHING.

COLOSSIANS, i. 28.

Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

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To a faithful minister of Christ, when his heart is full of love to his Divine Master, and tender affection to the souls of men, the time between one Sabbath and another seems long, if he has not in the interval some opportunity of addressing himself to the public exercise of his work; and the chief relief he has is in giving vent to something of that overflowing affection by private address: and would to God that it were always thus with us! that, like Elihu[1], we might be able to say, to say it as in the sight and presence of God, who knows our hearts, *I am full of matter, the spirit within me constraineth me, my belly is as wine which hath*

[1] Job xxxii. 18.

no vent; I will speak that I may be refreshed. It appears to have been the temper of the apostle, a consciousness of which led him, on the mention of *Christ*, as in the Colossians *the hope of glory*, to express his regard to him, and to describe the manner in which it discovered itself in the words of my text; *Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:* words which contain an admirable model for Christian ministers to study and follow, and will naturally lead into several reflections to which it is also of great importance for private Christians to attend. It will be natural here to consider.

I. The subject of the apostle's preaching —*We preach Christ.*

II. The manner of it—*Warning every man, and teaching every man.*

III. The end—*That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.* Having considered these, I shall conclude,

IV. With some practical application.—May the manner and end of my preaching this day illustrate the subject! We are to consider,

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I. The subject of the apostle's preaching; *whom we preach;* the preceding words must determine the sense of these, and they determine it very plainly; *Christ in you the hope of glory, whom we preach.*

It was the great business of the apostle to *preach Christ;* a phrase which is often proverbially used for preaching the gospel, for delivering the whole of that lesson with which he was charged; because Christ is the *Alpha and Omega, the first and the last* of the whole scheme and economy of the gospel. So, *we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness*[2]; but be it so, let them be ever so much offended, let them deride in ever so supercilious a manner, we go on to preach him; *not to preach ourselves*, as it is elsewhere expressed, *but Christ Jesus the Lord*[3]: pursuant to the great determination with which the apostle set out among the Corinthians, learned, polite, and delicate as they were, he determined to know nothing among them *save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* And this he esteemed a great honour, however others might think it matter of reproach. He, therefore, mentions it as an inestimable

[2] 1 Cor. i. 23.

[3] 2 Cor. iv. 5.

favour which he esteemed himself quite unworthy of, and never sunk so low in his own eyes, as when he thought of the astonishing grace of God in bestowing it upon him, *Unto me who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given, that I should preach amongst the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ*[4]: and when he was about to declare it in his epistle to Timothy, though a subject with which Timothy was so well acquainted, that *this was a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners*, even the chief of them, he could not mention it without previously breaking out into a rapture of praise; *I thank Christ Jesus my Lord, who counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry*[5]. SERM. VII.

[4] Eph. iii. 8.

[5] 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

It is farther to be observed here, that he preached Christ *as the hope of glory*, as the connexion with the words immediately preceding determine; *God has now made known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory, whom we preach.* It was, you see, the care and concern of the apostle, to raise the minds of *his* hearers to the views of glory;

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of *glory*, *honour*, *and immortality*, as he expresses it in his epistle to the Romans. He saw the generality of mankind were groveling in the pursuit of the ignoble objects of sense, and trifling concerns of the present life; as when our Lord speaks of eating, and drinking, and clothing, he says, *After all these things do the Gentiles seek*[6]; *the nations of the world seek*, as it is expressed in Luke[7]; as if our Lord had said, If ye could take a view of all the nations in the world, you would find them engaged in these low pursuits; not a nation, not a family, hardly a soul among them, full of the views of immortality, conscious of the dignity of its own immortal nature, and properly solicitous for its improvement and happiness. But it was one great design of the gospel to cure the nations of the world of this epidemical madness, and to direct their views and their hearts to something more worthy and noble: to inspire them with the hope of glory, the glory that comes from God, and that is to be enjoyed in and with him; the glory of being near the King of Heaven; standing as his favourites in his presence, yea, dwelling, and that for ever, as his children, in his

[6] Matt. vi. 32.
[7] xii. 30.

house, in his embraces. This is what the apostle, having himself caught the heavenly fire, and felt the heart-attracting touch, was desirous of. But then, there was but one way in which he directed them to seek and expect this glory; and that was by Christ, by *Christ in them:* Christ not only preached among them, and in external form and profession submitted to; but Christ received into their hearts; Christ formed in their souls: for this, therefore, as he elsewhere expresses it in his own emphatical language, and truly hardly any is so emphatical as his own; *he did even travail in birth*[8]. Hither, therefore, he directed all those that were desirous of true glory, and would have some solid foundation of hope, that they should not be like that of the hypocrite; *swept away as easily as the spider's web*, when God comes to take away his soul. HIM he preached; HIM he proclaimed as the word signifies: laboured to publish his gospel on every side, that a vast crowd of souls might press in to receive the benefit of it, as one who well knew that there was no *hope of glory* any other way; and that in this way none were preexcluded from that hope, even though

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[8] Gal. iv. 19.

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they had been guilty of the most aggravated crimes, and had even committed the greatest outrages against this compassionate Saviour himself.

II. Let us now consider the manner in which the apostle preached this doctrine, and bore this testimony; expressed in those words, *warning every man, and teaching every man.* This may imply the plain and practical manner in which he taught, and the particular application that he made to particular persons.

1. It may express the plain and practical manner in which he managed his ministry. He was concerned that every man might be taught, that every one might be able to comprehend and understand what he said, and therefore he did not disguise his preaching by difficult and unintelligible expressions, in consequence of which, how pure and elegant soever they might have been, *he would have been as a barbarian* to the persons to whom he addressed himself; but, as he elsewhere expressed it, he *used great plainness of speech*[9]; not as Moses, who put a veil upon his face; and indeed it is true that there are certain flights of language which in preaching

[9] 2 Cor. iii. 12, 13.

the gospel it is very improper to affect; and which are with great propriety called by Jude *swelling words of vanity;* though it is as true that there are some who are weak enough to be fond of them, and *have men's persons in admiration* upon account of what would lead wise men only to admire their folly. Some of these, as a very lively writer expresses it, were phrases at first invented to conceal the ignorance of those who affected the airs of superior wisdom, which others, lest they should seem to be ignorant, would seem to understand; but Paul was above such little artifices, and he had too affectionate a love to Christ his master to allow himself in the practice of them. It is true, indeed, the sublimity of his subject and something of an intricacy of style, which seems natural to him, led him sometimes to write *things hard to be understood*, as Peter expressly tells us he did; but the Spirit of God had wise ends in view in permitting this, and by far the greater part of his writings are clear, where they are not darkened by the ingenuity of commentators; and we have reason to believe the common course of his preaching was at least equally so, and probably yet clearer; in this respect,

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at least, that the voice sometimes determines some things which to the eye of a reader may appear ambiguous.

2. He managed his ministry very practically; he warned as well as taught; he insisted not only on the great doctrines of the gospel, but upon its practical precepts, as you plainly perceive, because by far the greater part of most of his epistles is taken up with them, nor did he only lay down the rule of duty, but he attended it with such cautions as might seem necessary and convenient, such as the circumstances of the hearers seemed to require. He warned and admonished them; cautioned them against the dangers and temptations with which they were surrounded; and no doubt often brought into public such admonitions as he knew their circumstances to require. According to the instructions that he gave Timothy, he, no doubt, *charged the rich that they should not be high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches*[1]; that they should not forget their poor brethren, and much less oppress them; but lay out their riches generously for their relief: *charged the poor that they should not be discontented; that they should not be idle, and*

[1] 1 Tim. vi. 17.

busybodies in other men's matters, when they had so much to do of their own; nor throw themselves upon charity when they might maintain themselves by the work of their own hands, as you see in his epistle to the Thessalonians. *Such* (says he) *we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread*[2]. He no doubt *charged young men to be sober-minded;* that they should take heed of trifling with temptations that might inflame their irregular appetites, and lead them into sin and shame and ruin: he insisted, no doubt, in his ministry as well as in his writings, on the relative duties; exhorting *husbands to love their wives, and wives to obey their husbands; and masters not to oppress their servants*, and *as many servants as were under the yoke to count their masters worthy of all honour;* yea, *the elders he exhorted, who also was an elder, that they feed the flock, taking the oversight of it, not as lords of God's heritage; and the deacons, that they should be grave, and rule their children and their own houses well*[3]. This may, I think, in some measure illustrate the expression of *warning, as well as teaching*

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[2] 2 Thess. iii. 12.

[3] 1 Tim. iii. 8—12.

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every man: but I do not think that it exhausts the whole meaning of it, and therefore add,

3. That it may include the private application he made to particular persons, *warning every man, and teaching every man;* visiting particular persons at their own houses, and there, it may be, to themselves, when alone, suggesting such exhortations and such admonitions as what he had heard or seen of them might require. This we know, in the general, he did at Ephesus; and there is reason to believe he did the same elsewhere; *teaching*, not only publicly, but *from house to house.* He was glad to bring religious discourse into the company of his friends; and if they thought like Christians, they would heartily welcome it. He would naturally be inquiring, as his heart was much set on the success of the ministry, whether they found their attendance upon ordinances comfortable and improving; whether they appeared to themselves to advance in religion, or to decline; whether there was any thing in which his prayers or advice could be serviceable to them. And for such reasons, we may be sure, he would, where he found occasion,

reprove, with proper degrees of gentleness or severity, as the different nature of the offence might require; and he would choose to do this before he brought matters to a more public cognizance, and proceeded to greater extremity.

4. He was careful to conduct all in the most prudent manner; *teaching in all wisdom:* which does not so much signify his instructing others in wisdom, though that was true, *we preach the wisdom of God in a mystery;* but his using wisdom and prudence in the manner in which he taught, therein showing himself a true servant of Christ, who taught his disciples many things as *they were able to bear them;* and so he expresses it, *We have many things to speak, but ye were not able to hear; we fed you with milk, and not with strong meat*[4], because you were not able to bear it: and we have a specimen of this, among others, in his address to the apostles at Jerusalem[5], where he communicated the freedom of the Jews themselves from their obligation to observe the Mosaic law, *privately to those of reputation, lest by any means he should have run in vain, or laboured in vain*[6]. Such discretion we may suppose he used in

[4] Heb. v. 12.

[5] 1 Cor. iii. 5.

[6] Gal. ii. 2.

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other things; studying the tempers of men, that he might avoid giving any offence, which he did to such a degree that, though free from every man, *he became the servant of all;* now this he did from the most benevolent principle; *I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but that of many, that they may be saved*[7]. You will easily perceive there was something very laborious and self-denying in such conduct. Let us, therefore, in the next place, proceed to consider,

[7] 1 Cor. x. 33.

III. The end he proposed to himself in all this.

Now it was indeed a most glorious and important end; nothing less than this, that he *might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.* Undoubtedly this presentation, to which he refers, is that at the Great Day, *when we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ;* and when ministers, as well as private Christians, must render an account of themselves to their great Judge. Then all believers shall be presented before God, as we read in many scriptures; Christ shall present the whole church to himself, set it directly in his presence, and in his full view,

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a glorious church[8]; even *he*, who intended, by the body of his flesh through death, *to present us holy and unblamable in his sight; he, who is able to keep us from falling, and present us* harmless and *blameless before the presence of his glory*[9]: ministers and people are to have a part in that interview; as we read, *he that raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise us up also with Jesus, and shall present us with you*[1]. Now, though it be the great office of Christ to present the whole church unto himself and to his Father, yet ministers are represented also as acting a subordinate part herein; and it is strongly intimated that they, who have been faithful and successful in their work, shall have the honour of marshalling, as it were, and setting before Christ, in something of distinct companies, the souls they have been instrumental in saving. So the apostle tells the Corinthians, *he had espoused them to one husband, that he might present them a chaste virgin to Christ*[2]; in reference to which he says to the Thessalonians, *Are not ye our crown of rejoicing in the presence of Jesus Christ, and at his coming?* And to this he undoubtedly refers here, when he says, *that we may present every man perfect in*

[8] Eph. v. 27.

[9] Col. i. 22.

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 14.

[2] 2 Cor. xi. 2.

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Christ Jesus; q. d. "This is what we aim at, that we may save souls; that we may carry on our hearers and our converts to the greatest height of Christian perfection we can now, that so we may have the pleasure of presenting them with a proportionable glory and joy before our Lord, when he comes to universal judgment, and shall make up an account with all his servants." From hence it appears that, as this day was much in his thoughts, so he looked upon it as a very desirable thing to have souls to present to Christ, and on this account could earnestly desire, if it were possible, every soul he had to do with might be in the blessed number of those who should be so presented.

1. It appears that, in the general, he thought it a very desirable thing to have souls to present to Christ at the great day, as those whom he had been instrumental in saving.

This was Paul's great concern. As for worldly circumstances, he did not much regard them; he had *learned how to be exalted or abased, to abound or suffer need;* nor was he greatly concerned about his life; he was willing, if God saw fit, to offer up even

his blood as a libation of the sacrifice of souls[3] which he was offering up to him. The great thing was that they might be saved; as he plainly tells us in so many words: *I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Jesus Christ, with eternal glory*[4]. As if he had said, "Let me be imprisoned, let me be slandered, let me be tortured, let me be slain, it matters but little, if I may but promote the salvation of immortal souls; *if by any means I may* not only myself *attain*, as he elsewhere expresses it, *to the resurrection of the dead;* but if in that day, when every man shall have praise of God, and receive according to his own work, I may have the honour of being in some peculiar manner approved by my great Judge; if I may then see a great number of happy souls crowding about me, as the person who has been their spiritual father; if I may look upon them as the harvest that has sprung up to Christ under my ministry, and may accordingly give them up into his hands, that they may be safe and happy for ever; to see but these glorified; to see the elect saved with an eternal salvation, and placed in such perpetual security and delight; and the

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[3] Phil. ii. 17.

[4] 2 Tim. ii. 10.

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blessed Jesus thus rewarded for all his labour and all his sufferings; oh, it will be joy unspeakable to receive their grateful acknowledgments, the assurance of their everlasting and most endeared friendship; and, which is infinitely more, to see the distinguished smile of my Lord, to hear him saying to me, *Well done, good and faithful servant!* Oh, it is great and glorious beyond all the pursuits of the children of men! The joys of victory, the honours of a crown, the majesty of universal empire, were little, were nothing, in comparison of this: yea, the very thought and expectation of it, under the seals which the Spirit of God now gives to my ministry, is more than all these things; so that, even while *sorrowing, we are always rejoicing;* because, while *poor, we are making many rich* in these hopes, and the graces which are preparatory to them, and so surely connected with them."

2. The expression may intimate the apostle's desire, that, if possible, every soul that he had to do with might be in the blessed number of those who should be thus presented. That we *may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:* q. d. "This is my heart's

desire and prayer, my daily labour and endeavour, that, if possible, not one soul of you may miscarry. Whatever others think, to me there appears something vastly important in every soul; as surely there must when I consider that it is immortal; that it is a soul which will be taken notice of, one way or another, by Christ in the great day; and appointed by him either to salvation or to damnation. I could be glad, if such were the will of God, to do something towards saving the rich, the great, the learned, the wise; their influence might be considerable, and the conquest would be peculiarly glorious to the grace of God and to the instruments of it; but since it is the Divine will, to stain the pride of human glory, *that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, should be called*[5]: I acquiesce; and well, indeed, may I esteem it my honour that, like my Divine Master, I am sent to preach the gospel to the poor: if I may be made wise to win souls, I leave it to God to choose who they shall be; if he gives to my ministry those that are in the lowest class of mankind with relation to genius, education, and worldly circumstances, I thankfully

[5] 1 Cor. i. 26.

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accept them. God will exalt their feeble powers; he will educate them for heaven; he will enrich and ennoble them there; yea, they are already enriched, if they are true believers; already ennobled, if they are the sons and daughters of the Most High God. If God will give me the souls of children, far from despising them, I will peculiarly rejoice in it, and adore his name, that *out of the mouth of babes and sucklings he ordained strength*, and revealed to these little creatures what *he hid from the wise and prudent*. Blessed be God! I feel that love in my soul to them, and, above all, to my Lord, my shepherd and theirs, that for his sake I can rejoice to *feed his lambs*, and find a softer and a sweeter pleasure in clothing my conceptions in such low and familiar language as may suit them, and letting fall a drop or two of saving knowledge into the narrow mouths of those little vessels, than in pursuing the most towering imaginations, or clothing my ideas in all the sublimity of language, to catch at the applause of those who think themselves wise men; who yet, alas! cannot truly deserve the name, if they have not learned the simplicity of little children, so as, *like new-born*

babes, to desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby. In a word," would the apostle have said, and will the true minister of the gospel say, "here alone my ambition has a boundless range, and my desires are enlarged to a degree that can never be completely satisfied. Methinks I know not how to reconcile myself to the thought that one soul should perish under my ministry: oh! that every one might be *presented perfect in Christ Jesus!* oh! that I might not be to one single soul *a savour of death unto death!* oh! that those who for many years have continued unaffected, unreformed (such there are at least under our preaching, if not under his) might, by some surprising and uncommon triumph of Divine grace, be wrought upon, and brought home! that, like the affectionate father in the parable, I might say, *This my son, that was dead, is alive again;* though I so long thought him lost, he is found; this stone is now become a child of Abraham; this barren tree, that so long encumbered the ground, now shoots forth its branches, is laden with fruit, and hung round with the trophies of all-conquering and new-creating grace!" But I may seem, perhaps,

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to enlarge too copiously on this head. Pardon me, my friends! it is my own heart that speaks; and in describing its sentiments, I had almost forgotten that I was paraphrasing the words of the apostle. I will endeavour, if possible, to include within the proper boundary of our time, the improvement and application of these things, with which I am to close the discourse:

IV. With an address both to ministers and private Christians.

1. Let ministers be both instructed and encouraged in their work by what I have now been saying.

Let them be instructed in their work by it. Let them learn what to preach, and how to manage their preaching as to the manner of it. I am speaking to many of you who are intended for the ministry, as well as to a few who are entered on it; to some who are just come among us, to whom I am addressing for the first Lord's Day they have sat under my ministry: I would therefore strictly charge such, and all who are designed for this glorious work, that they *preach Christ;* that they insist upon him as the only foundation of a

hope for glory; that they labour that he may be in all their hearers by a lively faith, and not only by outward profession; and I solemnly charge you all, my dear brethren, my joy and my hope, that you take the apostle for your model in a plain and practical way of preaching; that you *warn every man, and teach every man;* that you add private instruction and admonition to public; that you set a due value upon every soul under your care, that, if possible, not one of them may be lost; and that you labour after that prudence of conduct on which your success will so much depend; and watch over yourselves, that your behaviour may be not only inoffensive, but exemplary. Oh! remember that the soul is infinitely precious! remember at the price of whose blood souls were purchased; remember how long they are to endure; remember on what a state of consummate and endless happiness or misery they are to enter in a very little while; remember too what a precarious life this is, that we and they lead in this dying body; and how soon some little unobserved cause may on a sudden remove us from all capacity of attempting any thing farther in this great and good work, or

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remove them from any possibility of receiving any benefit from our continued labours. Let us, therefore, be as diligent and as zealous as it becomes those to be who see themselves and their hearers upon the borders of eternity, and who long to have the honour and pleasure of saving souls, and presenting them to Christ at the great day.

And let us draw our encouragement from that thought. Our work is hard; and truly it is often so unsuccessful that our hearts are ready to *fail us, and our hands to hang down.* I will not pretend to number the particular causes of our discouragement: indeed, who can number them? From without, and from within; from our enemies, and, must we not add, sometimes from our friends too; from those who pretend to be so, and upon the whole, perhaps, really are so: but there is this comfort, *the day of the Lord is at hand;* and then we shall see that, though we did not succeed in so many instances as we could have wished, yet what success we had was not a little thing. To *present every man* of our converts *perfect before Christ!* Why, if it were but one man that we had to present, would it not be a great matter? to say,

"Lord, blessed be thy name, thou hast not only by thy grace saved my soul, but thou hast made me the means of saving another: here is a creature, now made perfect in holiness, and just going to enter on perfect and perpetual glory, who had sunk down to hell, if it had not been for what thou wast pleased to do for him by my means; here am I, not, blessed be God, alone; but with a child whom my God has given me: here, Lord, is a soul on whom I shall look with everlasting delight, and say, the salvation of that perfect and excellent creature is an answer to my prayers, and, through grace, is the fruit of my labour. Oh, blessed be God! I have not lived, I have not prayed, I have not preached, in vain!" But, my brethren, I humbly hope that, if we are faithful to God, and zealous in our endeavours to serve our generation according to his will, it is not a single soul alone that will be our crown of rejoicing: we that are of any standing in the ministry have, most of us, seen at least some number of converts, and have had reason to believe that God has blessed our labours to the security, edification, and improvement of many more, who, perhaps, were in Christ before they

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knew us, but whom we likewise shall join with those who were their fathers in Christ, our dear brethren and friends too, in presenting before the throne. And I trust there will be many, whom we have not personally known; yea, perhaps, some to whom God may bless the memory of our labours when our mouths are silent in the dust; or, if we leave other memorials behind us, by which, *being dead, we may speak*, God may bless our writings to generations that are yet unborn. Therefore let our hope and our trust be in God: let us thank him, and take courage. Yea, let us reflect too that we are in God *a sweet savour in Christ, not only in them that believe, but in them that perish.* And we shall find that we have been so *in that day when the chief Shepherd shall appear*, and give to every faithful under shepherd, whether his labours have been more or less successful, *a crown of glory that fadeth not away*[6].

[6] 1 Pet. v. 4.

2. Let this engage private Christians to be willing to be thus taught and warned, and to take care to improve their teaching well.

Let it teach you to be willing to be thus taught and warned; be willing that we should *preach Christ.* There are some to whom his

name is very disagreeable; and an evangelical ministry is plainly burdensome. They want to hear something new; and, because they have some notion of the doctrines that relate to Christ, his person, incarnation, life, sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension, intercession, and kingdom, they imagine that they know all; though, indeed, with respect to all these, there are *unsearchable riches of Christ;* and, were some of those scorners to hear more attentively, they might, perhaps, every sabbath, learn something which they did not before know. But it is not our business to teach new things; but that *which we have heard from the beginning;* that which has in all ages been the means of saving souls, and, therefore, which is to be transmitted by us from one generation to another, and inculcated so as to be made familiar to minds to whom it is by no means sufficient to speak it once, or twice, or ten times; but *line must be upon line, and precept upon precept; line upon line, and precept upon precept.* Be patient, sirs, under these repeated instructions: perhaps Divine grace may, one day or another, make you thankful for them; and give you to taste a sweetness in them, of which you

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are now but little aware. I will add, be willing to be warned as well as taught; willing to hear of duty as well as privileges; or really you have no privilege but what will another day condemn you. It is dreadful to observe the pride and folly of some professors in this respect: they are displeased to hear duty urged, and sin reproved; and especially if it be a duty which they neglect, or a sin which their conscience charges them with: and yet these are the things which ought of all others to be most welcome to us, if we know the true use and design of ordinances. For my own part, God is my witness, I never intend to reflect upon or expose any person living in my public ministrations: I think it great folly and great wickedness to prostitute the ordinances of God to such bad purposes; but I think it my duty to be often pressing duties which many neglect; and to be warning you not only against sin in general, but against such particular sins as prevail, especially amongst professors; such as spiritual pride and evil speaking, rash judging, idleness, and insincerity: and I shall think it my duty to abound in such admonitions more and more; and this because I love and ho-

nour Christ, and am earnestly solicitous that his name should not be blasphemed, and that he may not have any thing against me for dealing treacherously in the important trust which he has reposed in me. Now in this respect I do earnestly entreat you, that you will submit yourselves to those who preside over you in the Lord. And if the pastor, or the elders of the church to which you respectively belong, should also judge it their duty to admonish you in private of any thing which appears to be inconsistent with or dishonourable to a Christian profession, bear with them, and remember that it is one of the most painful and self-denying offices of friendship which they can perform. Remember that *this we wish, even your perfection*[7]; the pleasure of *presenting you perfect in Christ Jesus*. And that if plain and tender reproof be not a token of love, then it is impossible to mention any thing that is. But it will not be enough to bear with our instructions and admonitions, whether in public or in private; see that you improve our teaching well. My dear brethren! it is now a great many years [illegible]at many of you; several, that all of you

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[7] 2 Cor. xiii. 9.

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have heard of Christ; have heard him plainly, affectionately, and faithfully preached: let me now urge, to what purpose have you heard? have you secured an interest in him? do you walk in him? what do you more than others? what visible glory of real and practical religion is there upon your lives, that bears any proportion to such privileges? Oh, *give all diligence to make your calling and your election sure;* live by faith in Christ: and remember that there is no being represented comfortably before God any other way.

I conclude, with desiring your prayers for me, that I may be enabled and assisted in the discharge of all my duties, public and private; and that the blessing of God may attend them. That we may see true religion extended to hearts at present destitute of it, and flourishing more visibly and gloriously in those which are already acquainted with it; and particularly on those labours which, after so long an interruption, I am now going to resume; may they end in what we have been describing! in my *presenting you perfect in Christ Jesus in the day of the Lord;* that I may have the applause of my great

Master, and you the comfort and advantage! I desire to be truly sensible that I am a very weak and a very unworthy creature; and that, far from deserving the honour of such success, I do not deserve to be employed in the work, though ever so unsuccessfully; but, as the apostle expresses it in the following words, with which he concludes the chapter, and I shall conclude the discourse, I would *labour here unto striving according to his working*. Oh! may I be able to add, *which worketh in me mightily! Amen!*

SERMON VIII.

THE CHARACTER OF THOSE WHO ARE NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD; WITH A SERIOUS ADDRESS TO SUCH PERSONS.

MARK, xii. 34.

Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.

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THOUGH the Christian ministry is a noble employment, which, when faithfully pursued, has its sublime pleasures, and will, undoubtedly have its glorious rewards; yet it has its great difficulties, and pressing sorrows; and our hearers would often pity us if they knew *what sorrow we have in our hearts daily* on account of many who are committed to our care. There are not a few who attend upon Divine ordinances in the most awful and affectionate administration of them for many years, and seem not at all impressed with them; so that we know not certainly, whether they have ever felt any thing of the power of the gospel on their

hearts for one single hour in all that time. And others, who have seemed for awhile greatly affected with it, outgrow those impressions, and, perhaps, afterwards become more hardened in consequence of them; and in this case the disappointment is yet more grievous than in the former, as that of the florist, when he sees the curious production which he had nursed up with so much care, withering in the bud, and when it was just beginning to blow, is greater than it would have been if it had never appeared from the seed. I have, therefore, chosen to devote the labours of this day to the case of those who are awakened and impressed by the gospel, but not yet thoroughly determined in their choice of religion; or, in the language of my text, *are not far from the kingdom of God.* SERM. VIII.

And I most earnestly bespeak the attention of such, and particularly of young ones, who are in such a case; and I shall address them with great plainness, amidst the agitations of hope and fear; hope, that being approached so near to the kingdom, they may be persuaded to enter into it; yet not unallayed with fear, lest what they now feel,

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and may further feel in consequence of this address, instead of securing their happiness, should increase their misery.

The words were addressed by our blessed Redeemer to a certain scribe, who came to him with a curious kind of question, *What was the great command of the law?* which some think was founded upon a notion which the Jews had, that there was one command of such great excellence and importance, that, if a man were careful in the observance of it, it would certainly secure his acceptance with God, though he should forget or neglect the rest. This notion, if it did so early prevail, was a very absurd one; and some have thought, that the apostle James sets himself particularly against it, when he presses it as an observation of so great weight, that he, who allowedly *breaks one command, is guilty of all.* Some later Rabbis are said to have determined this matter in the most absurd and fatal manner which can be imagined, and have thought that there were some ceremonial precepts on which God laid so great a stress, that to a strictness in them, he would pardon every fault that could be consistent with them. But,

our Lord, far from encouraging so pernicious a maxim, most wisely selects a command which was of such a nature as would infallibly draw after it a regard to all the rest; mentioning that in the sixth of Deuteronomy[1], which, if the tradition of very ancient Jewish writers may be believed, their scribes taught them to repeat every day; and which it is certain that the modern Jews do indeed daily repeat, though, alas! they seem so little practically to attend to it: *hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first and great command: and the second is like unto it;* i. e. a comprehensive view of all relative, as the other of all religious duties; *thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* The scribe approved the reply, and bore witness to the propriety of it, declaring this great moral precept to be of greater importance than any ceremonial institution whatsoever, even sacrifice itself. Upon which our Lord makes this answer, *Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.* q. d. Thou standest fair for becoming one of my disciples, and receiving

[1] Deut. vi. 5.

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the blessings of my spiritual and eternal kingdom; though thou art not yet numbered among my followers. What became of this scribe afterwards, we cannot particularly say. Whether he opened his heart to admit the gospel, and so obtained its invaluable privileges and blessings; or, whether he rested in these good speculations, and perished on the very confines of salvation. My business is with those who are in the condition at that time his, and of whom it may be said, that they *are not far from the kingdom of heaven*, though for the present they fall short of it. And in the prosecution of my design with relation to such, I will

I. Describe the persons who may be said to be in such a state.

II. I will endeavour to convince such, how much they should be concerned not to rest in it.

III. I will give them such advices as may suit their present circumstances. And,

IV. Conclude with a short application to persons of more advanced attainments in religion, and who assuredly belong to the kingdom of God. And, oh! that the number of such may be increased by the Divine

blessing on those plain, but weighty things, which you are now to hear! SERM. VIII.

I. I am to describe the persons, of whom the best which can be said of them is, that they *are not far from the kingdom of God;* that they are advanced considerably towards true religion, though they have not actually attained it. And, while I describe it, I beg you will examine yourselves, that you may judge of your own case. Now there may be considerable knowledge, and blameless morals, and strong convictions, and partial reformation, and some strictness, not only in public, but private devotion; where a person remains in the state and character in which I am endeavouring to persuade you not to rest.

1. There may be some considerable degree of religious knowledge, yet a man may be in the state I am describing. Speculative knowledge in religion may be obtained, just as knowledge of any other kind, by any tolerable degree of understanding and industry: and when there is a proper care in those that have the conduct of young persons to inculcate it, it is hardly possible,

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that the persons so taught should remain entirely ignorant of it. Nay, it is possible, that this knowledge may be in some cases very accurate; and may far exceed that, which others, who have the truth of religion in their hearts, have obtained. As sometimes a use may also be made of it, pernicious, rather than beneficial. It may also be a very solid kind of knowledge; a person may (like the scribe in my text) see, and know, yea, and inculcate it upon others, that religion consists in the love of God and our neighbour, much more than in sacrifice or ceremonies of any kind; and yet he may be destitute of it: for it is one thing to know that faith and holiness are necessary to salvation, and another very different thing, to have them in our hearts. Again,

2. There may be blameless morals, where a person is still in the case I am describing. Morality is, to be sure, of great importance; it is much more than any refinement of speculation; and there can be no true religion without it. But, when we consider what we mean by a person of blameless morals, it will evidently appear to fall much short of a truly religious character. We mean by it,

one that is free from any gross act of injustice or of intemperance: now a mere natural ingenuity of temper may set a man above such scandalous vices as these. Some constitutions are so happily turned, that there is no strong inclination to acts of great licentiousness; and, where there is some strong impulse towards them, they may be restrained by a regard to reputation and interest in life, which must necessarily be destroyed by drunkenness and lewdness, as well as palpable acts of dishonesty. Prudence may restrain some, and good nature and tenderness to friends, whose very hearts might be broken by such practices, may restrain others; and one motive or another of this kind might preserve a tolerable face of virtue in an atheist, and much more in one who speculatively believes religion, though he feels not its power on the heart. But farther,

3. There may have been strong convictions of the evil of sin, and the danger to which we are exposed by it; and yet you may be in the condition I am describing. Indeed, the considerations which religion suggests are so obvious, and they are so

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important, that it is strange if those who have been religiously educated have not been in some degree moved by them. In all the tenderness and warmth of youth, is it possible to hear of God and his perfections, and mercy; to hear of the account we are to render him; to hear of the wonders of redeeming love, and the awful solemnities of death, judgment, and eternity; and not to be affected? I doubt not, most of you have felt in some degree, the power of these things. You have felt them under the ordinances of God; and, if you have outgrown them in some degree, you have perhaps been made to feel them more sharply by the discipline of his rod. Affliction has seized you; has confined you, perhaps, to your chamber and to your bed; and you thought the residue of your days was just going to be cut off, and that your souls were passing into an eternal state; and then you were terrified, perhaps beyond measure; all you felt in your body, and in your mind too, seemed to be but the beginning of sorrows, even when the present agony of mind almost swallowed up the sense of bodily pain and disorder. Your souls have been, as it were,

convulsed, and all the powers of them shaken; but it has been no more than a fit, like that of Felix, who trembled when he heard *Paul reason of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come;* but referred the matter to another time, and soon outgrew it all; and continued as unjust, and as intemperate as before. And, perhaps, all the consequence with respect to you may have been, that, instead of engaging you to love religion, what you have felt has inclined you to fear it; as if such great agony and terror were necessarily connected with it. But, perhaps, you have gone yet farther, and imagined that some solid fruits of these convictions are apparent; I must, therefore, add,

4. There may have been a reformation of many things which were amiss, and yet it may only be said of you, that *you are not far from the kingdom of God.*

Reformation is, indeed, the most substantial proof of true repentance; and, where it is universal and extends to the heart as well as to the life, it is happy indeed: but, it is very evident, that a partial reformation may be consistent with the allowed indulgence of some sin in the heart and life; and, conse-

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quently, with an estrangedness from God. You well know that Herod not only *heard John* the Baptist *gladly, but he did many things;* and that to be sure increased the pleasure with which he heard him: but he still retained one beloved lust, and this brought him not only to imprison but murder the preacher whom he had so much regarded. And I have often observed, that when the follies of childhood, in which the earliest impressions of religion were lost, have been over, young persons, arriving towards the years of manhood, have been impressed with religion, and have set themselves to what they often call, making their peace with God; they have been in a degree humbled before him on account of their sins; they have avoided some of the grosser follies for which their consciences checked them, and have put on the form of religion; and in this state have been tempted to rest for awhile, and in some instances it has, upon further information in the nature of true Christianity, grown up to it; but in others, even this has quickly been lost, and they have fallen into great licentiousness, and in other instances it has been rested in and

trusted to, I fear, to their destruction. Which leads me to add, SERM. VIII.

5. There may be a form not only of public, but private devotion; and yet you may be in the case I am describing, and only approaching to the kingdom of God. The total omission of public devotion is so gross and scandalous a thing, that, unless it be in case of lamentable prejudice and gross delusion, it is hardly possible for any man, who has any regard to his safety or reputation, to allow himself in it: very little stress, therefore, to be sure, is to be laid on a customary attendance upon it; though, alas! some are so very ill instructed in religion, as to lay a great deal of stress upon it, and to talk of *the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!* with a confidence that is equally pitiable and shameful, when we consider what God himself has so expressly declared, as to the vanity of such words.

But a regularity in secret devotion is a much more promising circumstance: and, indeed, where secret duties are conscientiously practised, and an inward sense of God is maintained on the heart, with a desire of approving all the secret sentiments

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of the soul in his presence; I know no more certain mark of real religion, nor any thing that can more certainly denominate a man a faithful subject of God's kingdom; supposing a proper regard maintained to Christ in our approaches to God, and our converse with him. But it is very evident, that there may be the form of secret devotion where the heart is very little engaged. Where children are religiously brought up, they are early taught to pray; they learn a form of words, and they are at first obliged by the authority of parents or other governors, to repeat them morning and evening; this forms a custom, and it fixes something of a conviction too, that, when it is omitted, makes young persons uneasy; and conscience stares them in the face for a failure, in what was no more than an unmeaning form. It is a burthen to do it, and it is, perhaps, a greater burthen quite to neglect it: so that they know not how to be easy with it or without it; so that, perhaps, matters are compromised, and the custom is retained; a few heartless words are run over in a cursory manner, and this is called secret prayer, and it serves to quiet conscience and ward off

conviction; though there be not one cordial sentiment of inward devotion from the beginning to the end of a week, or a month. SERM. VIII.

And thus you see, how far it is possible for you to go, and yet remain in an unsafe state; so that the best that can be said of you shall be, that *you are not far from the kingdom of God.* But some may be ready to say, wherein do such persons as I have been describing fail? is not this a beautiful and a lovely character; to have right notions of religion, blameless morals, strong convictions, to reform many things that have been formerly amiss! to worship God in his house, to worship him in the closet too! what can be wanting where this is the case? what! why that which is the very life of all. You might as well ask, if you looked upon a corpse that was not torn in pieces, or any way crumbled asunder; here is the entire body of a man, here are hands, and feet, and eyes, and ears, and lips; and what can be wanting? The soul, that should give life to all; and for want of which even these members, complete as they may seem, will soon fall to pieces. I will tell you, sirs, in a few words, what is wanting: a principle of true faith

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in Christ, productive of love to God, and delight in all his will; and, till that be added, your religion is vain.

If this that I have now been describing is all, you want a true faith in Christ. You have never seen your need of him aright, if you have never taken shelter in him. You may, indeed, have been alarmed, and so might the man-slayer when pursued by the avenger of blood; but it was not a fit of trembling that would save him, if he did not fly to the city of refuge. The true Christian solemnly commits his soul into the hands of Christ, to be saved by him in his own way; and it is this that distinguishes his case from that of one who is only approaching the kingdom of God.

And then it is a faith that is productive of love to God, a heart reconciled to him, a heart delighting in him, choosing him as our supreme portion, and thinking of him with a secret complacency under that character; even when its worldly circumstances are most straitened. It is a principle that will engage us to delight in all his will. Never was more of a religious character expressed in a few words than in those of the apostle,

I delight in the law of God after the inner man; especially when it arises to that of the Psalmist, not only fearing the Lord, but *delighting greatly in his commands.* Depend upon it, my friends, religion is never sincere, till it becomes a pleasure. To desire to compound for as little of it as possible is a certain sign of an insincere heart. He that is afraid of going too far in religion is a stranger to the first principles of it. There may, indeed, and there ought to be a caution against the extremes of enthusiasm and superstition; but these are not religion: and I must repeat it again, that for people to guard against the most eminent heights and attainments in religion, as what they would gladly omit and avoid, is a sad sign of an insincere heart.

And thus I have described the character of those of whom it can only be said, they *are not far from the kingdom of God:* whatever their knowledge, or their morality, their convictions, or their reformation may be, how exact soever they may be in the form of public, or even private devotion, they are strangers to a true faith in Christ; such a faith as is productive of love to God, and engages

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them to delight in all his will: there is some secret reserve in favour of some beloved sin; some allowed estrangedness of heart from God, which poisons and ruins all. And now,

II. I am to endeavour to convince persons of such a character that this is not a state to be rested in. And I shall only urge upon them these two considerations: If you continue in this state, you will never *enter into the kingdom of God;* and your falling short of it will be a case of peculiar wretchedness.

1. If you continue in this state, you will never *enter into the kingdom of God.*

For the proof of this, I must refer you to the whole tenour of the word of God, and particularly to that solemn declaration of Christ, which proves all I have said, *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father that is in heaven.* And oh! what a grievous thing is it to be excluded from this kingdom, if you were to consider it simply in this view, as an exclusion, and separate from every circumstance of peculiar aggravation. Formed as we are

with necessary desires of happiness, how eagerly do we lay hold of every opportunity of rising to a more advantageous state! and how severely would you reflect upon yourselves, if, for the sake of some trifling amusement, you had lost an opportunity of the greatest preferment, and of making yourselves rich and noble for life? but what a momentary vanity is life, when its possessions and splendour are compared with a heavenly kingdom, with an unfading crown of glory? To have lost it will appear matter of perpetual lamentation, especially when you consider what will become of those who are excluded from it. Is there any admission for such, after long knocking, and waiting, and entreating? Observe in how magisterial a manner he has declared the contrary, upon whose will the determination of the affair depends: *When once the master of the house is risen up, and has shut to the door, and ye stand without, saying, Lord, open; he shall say, I know you not.* When the door is once shut, it is shut once for all; the exclusion is final; and that is terrible. But much more is to be added. Alas! there is another receptacle for those who are shut out of the

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kingdom of God. While the wretched soul stands in vain knocking and entreating, the messengers of vengeance seize it; and can you imagine whither they bear it? to what a place? to what company? to what a condition? What think you, sirs, is become of the spirit of that man that died yesterday, and is excluded from the kingdom of heaven? Is it fallen into a peaceful slumber; into pleasing dreams, or profound insensibility? Alas! it wakes to misery; and to what misery? who can describe it? who can conceive it? yea, who can bear to think of what little may be conceived of it; when it is considered as in a state of final despair, of irreversible condemnation? It is grievous to see what a change a few hours sometimes make in the state of a man in this world. It pains me to recollect what I have seen when persons, young persons, who but a few days before were in perfect health and cheerfulness, have been seized with a sudden violent distemper; and I have beheld them writhing in agony, their countenances perhaps gathering blackness, and their spirits terrified in the apprehension of appearing before God: to stand by their bedside at such a time, incapable of giving

ease to their bodies, and quite at a loss to know how to begin to administer that instruction which may be the foundation of any solid comfort to their minds. But oh! what is this situation to that into which a week, a day, an hour, may bear any of you, who are in the case I have been describing? when all the agony of mind and body, to be borne throughout a miserable eternity, are, as it were, united in the moment that begins it. A miserable eternity! I hardly know how in such a connexion to speak of it; but I earnestly entreat you, that you would seriously reflect what it is; and think as attentively as you can, though it will be in a very imperfect manner, what it must be for you to fall into it. I say *for you;* as I am to add,

2. That your falling short of the kingdom of God will be a case of peculiar wretchedness; which will appear when it is considered from what you are fallen, and for what such a misery is incurred.

It will appear peculiarly dreadful when it is considered from what you have fallen; from what high hopes, from what glorious privileges, from what towering expectations, with which you had once flattered yourselves.

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You that were by birth, as it were, *the children of the kingdom*, and had flattered yourselves that you should have been the heirs of it. The Lord Jesus Christ mentions this as the most lamentable circumstance of all. *There shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves shut out:* especially when you see *many come from the north, and west, and south, to sit down with them in it, while you, the children of the kingdom, are excluded:* others possessed of it who wanted your advantages; especially when you come to think how near you came; what steps you took; so that you seemed, as it were, at the gates, upon the very threshold. The balances hovering so long in uncertainty, coming so near to an equipoise, and yet at last that a vanity lighter than air should turn them.

Oh! that will be a most deplorable circumstance! to think for what it was that all this sublime happiness was lost, and this insufferable misery incurred. Indeed, there would be room to make that reflection in any imaginable circumstance. I remember it is

said of Henry the Fourth of France, that before his accession to that throne, one of his predecessors, in whose power he then was, threatened him with immediate death if he would not renounce his religion; and accordingly he was induced to do it: and when a Protestant minister afterwards met him, and expostulated with him about it, he answered, it was for my life and the crown of France. And what if you could say the like, that you had sold your immortal hopes for life and for a crown; for the crown of the whole world, as our Lord himself states it: *What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* What would he not give to redeem it again, when he had sold it for all the world? But alas! sirs, it is a truth as certain as it is awful and affecting, that the kingdom of God is generally sold for something of little importance to men's worldly happiness; nay, very frequently, for things which prove the occasion of their misery in this world as well as in the next.

Surely, if you have considered these things with any attention, you will be alarmed; and will be desirous of being advised. And do

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you indeed desire it? If I could be sure that you did, I should proceed with great pleasure to the third general head, where I am,

III. To suggest some proper advices for those who *are not far from the kingdom of God*, but have not yet attained so far as to be entitled to the blessings of it. And here what shall I say? Indeed I have seriously asked my own heart what I should say. If I were to speak no more; if I were to leave this discourse as my legacy to you and to the world (and truly, if such were the Divine pleasure, I could be willing that it should be so), I would now breathe out my soul in every word, and I could be contented, if Providence should so appoint it, to breathe my last in words like these.

1. Let me invite you to retirement and serious consideration. Let me beseech you to take your morning and your evening moments; to meet God and your own consciences. Contrive convenient times and seasons for this purpose; and, having prudently fixed them, be resolute in keeping to them when it is in your power, and duty does not call you at that time to some other

place and employment. I remember to have heard of a wise man, who on his dying bed addressed himself to his eldest son, who was a very licentious youth, and entreated him that he would promise as a man on honour that he would spend one quarter of an hour every day alone, without the amusements of books or paper, employing himself for that time only in thought. So easy a request was not to be denied to a dying parent, nor could the youth himself immediately forget it; and, while thus alone, it soon occurred to him to reflect, to what purpose it was that so wise a man as his father should make what seemed to him to be so odd a request; but so near does wisdom dwell to a heart disposed to inquire after it, that a set of thoughts soon arose in his mind, which proved the occasion not only of his reformation, but of his conversion too. What if you were, for a while at least, to make this experiment? and, if you want employment in retirement, take the word of God for your counsellor, and try to improve it to the best purpose.

2. Let me urge you to earnest prayer. I say, to earnest prayer; because a cold and formal address will only look like bespeaking a denial.

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Be assured, nothing will do without this. It is the power and grace of God that must bring you into his kingdom; and this grace is to be obtained and expected in answer to prayer. Reply not, you do pray: you pray; but how? In a cold and formal manner! to keep up a custom, and to soften, if not silence, the clamours of conscience. But, oh, sirs! there is a cause, a cause sufficient to quicken your importunity.

It is for a kingdom, for *a crown of glory;* it is an immortal soul that is at stake, and it is its endless happiness or misery is in question. Oh! how importunate are young persons, in particular, for what they eagerly desire! If it be but the amusement of an hour of pleasure; if it be but some trifling ornament of dress; if they hope to obtain it by importunity, how pressing are they! Would to God there were as earnest desires and addresses in a cause which so well deserves them; and where an eager importunity would be as great an honour, as in these trifles, of which I speak, it is a weakness and reproach.

3. Communicate your case freely to some experienced Christians, and entreat them to advise you and to watch over you. If you cannot speak to your parents, or your minis-

ter, to whom one would imagine a case of this kind might be most naturally brought; is there no other friend and acquaintance with whom you could use that liberty; to whom you may discover the struggle you feel in your mind, the concern with which your heart is impressed, and your fear lest you should after all fall short of heaven? The very communication would do you some service, and impress the matter yet more deeply upon your mind: their advice might likewise be weighty; their prayers for you might also be successful. Invite them, therefore, to the performance of such a kind office; at least, do not discourage them in it. That were cruelty to yourselves, as well as disrespect to them. Others may indeed have some interest in it, that you should be wise and religious; parents and masters have especially a great interest that their children and servants be so; but it is your own souls that are in question: your own concern, therefore, in the matter is infinitely greater than theirs. *If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it*[3]. That you may become thus wise,

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[3] Prov. ix. 12.

4. Observe what the things are that have

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turned you back, and be particularly upon your guard against them. Convictions have worn off, and good impressions have been lost, I may take it for granted, with regard to every one of you to whom I am addressing myself; and how have they been worn off and lost? Surely it would be worth your while to look back and inquire. Was it by forsaking retirement, and neglecting prayer? was it by reading trifling books, or keeping vain company? or, which ensnare abundance, of young persons especially, the love of sport, or the love of liquor? Say to yourselves in the review, *What fruit had I in these things?* Come, my soul, let me balance the account, and inquire what I have gained by that company, by these amusements, and pleasures, and companions, for they are not worthy to be called friends, for which I have turned back from my God, when I was following after him, and seemed in a fair way for obtaining his favour and friendship? Think of this, and avoid the snare by which you have been taken, perhaps again and again. A child, yea, even an irrational creature, will, in many cases, be cautious how it comes near a place in which it has been hurt, or a person

by whom it has suffered; and will you always be running upon the same snare, and into the same mischief? If you learn not wisdom from the experience of others, learn it at least from your own. And, that you may not be always learning without coming to the knowledge of the most important truth, let me advise you,

5. That if you feel God moving upon your heart by his Holy Spirit, you should take the first opportunity of giving yourselves up to him with all the solemnity you can. It seems a matter of great importance to consider our devotedness to God in a federal view, as a covenant transacted between him and us. Let me, therefore, persuade you to weigh the nature of the covenant; to compare its demands on the one hand with its blessings on the other. When you have done this, consider seriously, is it not an advantageous contract? is it not your interest, as well as your duty, to give a cordial and thorough consent to it? And if you find it so, take proper methods to declare that consent with due solemnity. Present yourselves before God on your knees, and let this be your language: "Blessed God! I adore thy condescension in tendering to me such a covenant as is exhi-

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bited in thy word; and I accept it with all my heart; I take thee for my covenant God and father; I take Christ to save me, and thy blessed Spirit to sanctify me throughout, in body, soul, and spirit. I take thy word for my rule, and thy glory for my end; the everlasting enjoyment of thee for my final good and happiness: and this I do deliberately, resolutely, and, by thy grace, unchangeably; devoting myself to thee, to be thy faithful servant and dutiful child for ever; putting myself and all my interests into thy hands, and trusting thy care, and providence, and promises, for time and eternity." Declare this before God; put it into writing, as Nehemiah, you know, did the covenant into which he would lead the Israelites. And, as the Lord's Supper is particularly appointed in this view, renew this covenant by an early and solemn attendance upon this ordinance; and thus, as it were, put your seal to it in the sight of God, and angels, and men. Having done this,

6. Labour to be steady in it, and guard against the first step of apostacy. You may certainly depend upon it that, in such a circumstance as this, the eyes of your spiritual

enemies will be upon you for evil; and it will be their care and their joy to ensnare and corrupt one of the covenant servants of God, and thereby to bring a disgrace upon his family. Probably the attempt will be made at first to draw you into some smaller irregularities; to alienate your hearts from communion with God, and a high relish for devotion; and so, by insensible degrees, you may be drawn backward till you fall into evils which the enemy has too much address at present so much as to suggest to your thoughts. But remember the solemnity of your engagements. Having opened your mouth to the Lord, remember that you cannot go back without the most aggravated guilt; nor look behind you when you have set your hand to his plough. Take heed *of grieving the Spirit of God*, and provoking him to withdraw his quickening and strengthening influence, which, if they be withdrawn, you will feel yourself like Samson when his hair was cut off. Keep, therefore, your heart with all keeping, and commit it daily to the keeping of God and the guardianship of his grace.

7. Seek the greatest improvement in reli-

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gion, and be upon your guard against setting any measure to yourselves in it. To press forward is the only sure way you can take to avoid going backward; for we proceed in religion like a heavy body thrown upward, which begins to fall the very moment in which it ceases to ascend. Endeavour, therefore, always to know more and more of God, to love him better and better, and to make divine things more and more familiar to your minds. *Forgetting the things that are behind*, in the language of him whose attainments were by mortals unequalled, *be pressing forward to those that are before.* I have known those who have determined they would be no richer in this world; and, though they may have proceeded with diligence and growing success in their callings, have resolved to lay by no more, but to spend whatever was more than sufficient for the present necessities of their families in works of piety and charity; and they have found their business and their success pleasanter than ever; but, oh! beware of any thing that looks like such a resolution in religion. Indulge, if I may be allowed the expression, an insatiable avarice and ambition here. Rise as high as possible in the

Divine favour, and *lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven*, as large as you possibly can; yea, let any extraordinary degrees of progress already made, or which shall be made, quicken rather than abate your future diligence.

8. *What you do, do quickly*, under a serious sense of the uncertainty of the day of life, and the greater uncertainty of the day of grace. You see young persons continually dying around you, and you know that your own life depends upon a precarious breath, that may be stopped before my sermon concludes. Never rest, therefore, till the great concern, the end of life, is secure; for, unless that is secure, *it had been good for you that you had not been born*. This is a solemn call, the neglect of which may be peculiarly provoking to God; so that he may either immediately cut you off, or give you up to the corruption of your own hearts. As there is the last act of respiration in the lungs, and pulsation in the heart, after which the circulation of the blood stops, and the man immediately dies; so there is such a thing as the last motion of the Spirit of God upon the soul, after which the man is dead as to all

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hopes of future conversion and salvation. And how know you but that emotion which you now feel in your hearts, and which you are deliberating whether you shall or shall not comply with, may be that last motion. I leave the matter seriously with you; and now turn myself from you to conclude,

IV. With a few words of advice to persons of a different character.

There are indeed those who are far from the kingdom of God; whose notorious wickedness, even under the means and ordinances of the gospel, declares aloud that they are *aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise. Their sins go before them to judgment;* and *if their consciences were not seared with a hot iron,* they would make them to know that *their damnation slumbers not.* But I will not now address myself to them.

This application is destined to those who have proceeded beyond the boundary marked out above, and who are indeed entered into the kingdom of God. And to such,

1. Let me awaken your thankfulness to that grace which brought you into so secure

and happy a state. You were once in the kingdom of Satan; you were inclined to continue in it; but the power and the grace of God has effected the happy translation from the one to the other. To awaken your thankfulness, think of the privileges and blessings you may now call your own. Let it delight you to reflect, "Christ has a little kingdom on earth, and I am one of the few that belong to it: when he looks down upon his faithful subjects, he numbers me among them, and bears towards me the heart of a gracious sovereign, my protector and guardian; yea, such is his infinite condescension, my friend too."

2. Look with tender compassion on those of whom it can at best be said, they *are not far from the kingdom of God;* yea, perhaps, so much cannot be said of them. Are there not many such, your countrymen, your neighbours? Yea, what shall I say? are there not such among the members of your families; perhaps your children, at least your servants? And is it not a deplorable case? Pity them; advise them; pray for them; and, when you have prayed, renew your efforts, even those which may before have been ineffectual. Did

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you see upon them the probable symptoms of a mortal distemper beginning to seize them, you would speak to them plainly; you would warn them of the consequences again and again, and would urge them to seek out for help. Oh! why are your compassions no more tender, no more active, when the death with which they are threatened is eternal? And when your efforts succeed not, look up to heaven, and say, "O Lord, my words die in the air; but thou hast a voice, speak to them, and they shall hear; call them by it into thy kingdom, and they shall obey."

3. Live as those who are in the kingdom of God in one sense, and near it in another, yet more sublime and important. Remember your privileges and your hopes, and let them animate you to walk worthy of him who has called you to glory and virtue; who has *begotten you again to a lively hope of an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.* You have salvation, complete salvation, in view; and it approaches; it *is nearer than when you believed;* it comes daily nearer and nearer. We may look upon every true Christian, and say to him, and especially to one advanced in the journey of life, *Thou*

art not far from the kingdom of God. A few days, or at most a few years more, will bring thee to its glories and joys. Thou shalt be there, even in the kingdom, beholding the King in his glory, eating bread and drinking wine there, living and reigning with him. Bear it daily in thy mind, and endeavour to form thy soul more and more to that song in which, I hope, through Divine grace, so many of us shall join: *Salvation be to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb, who has redeemed us to God by his blood, and made us kings and priests;* that we might reign and worship for ever. To Him be glory, world without end. Amen."

SERMON IX.

THE DAYS OF THE UPRIGHT KNOWN UNTO GOD.

PSALM xxxvii. 18.

The Lord knoweth the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be for ever.

SERM. IX. OMNISCIENCE so evidently belongs to Deity, that the heathens ascribed it to the imaginary beings whom they worshiped; and all the religion of an oath which so generally prevailed in all ages and countries, is founded upon the belief of it. Yet the belief and consideration of it is of so great importance, that we are not to wonder that the omniscience of the one living and true God is so often mentioned in scripture; and that it is not only asserted in general terms, but brought into distinct view with regard to a variety of particulars evidently comprehended in such general assertions. The instruction and consolation to be derived from general truths arise from the application of

them to particular circumstances and occasions, and it is in this view that this great principle is so particularly pointed out in the words of my text, *The Lord knoweth the days of the upright.* This expression may seem nearly parallel to that other with which the very first of these sacred compositions concludes, *The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous*[1]; for it is evident, that the righteous, and the upright, are words entirely of the same signification; but there is this difference between the two passages, that the words in the first Psalm may particularly express God's approbation of the actions of the good man, whereas this reaches further and includes his attentive notice, both of his actions and the various events that befall him. Days, you know, are often put for life; *all the days of the afflicted are evil*, i.e. his life is made burthensome and uncomfortable; *Thou hast made my days as a hand's breadth; my days* (i. e. my life) *are like a shadow that declineth.* And you well know, that the life of a man signifies both his actions, and the events which he passeth through. The text, therefore, asserts, that God knows and observes how every day passes with the good man,

[1] Ps. i. 6.

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what he is every day thinking and doing, and what those events are which every day befall him; and the expression of days points out the particularity of those actions and events in something of a more emphatical manner, than if more general terms had been used. God knows all his actions and behaviour; not only those external actions which are obvious to the eye of the world, but those secret actings of the heart which are as real as any external actions whatsoever; and are of the greatest importance, as marking the character much more surely than external actions can do, and as being far more numerous too. He knows also, the various scenes through which the upright man passes; whether they be scenes of enjoyment, or scenes of affliction, in their various kinds; how he is affected with them, and how he behaves under them: it is true, indeed, that in all these senses God knows the days of the wicked too; and the time will come when he will make it appear, how ready soever the wicked may be to say, *How does God know, and is their knowledge in the Most High?* But it is very evident, that my text signifies the pleasurable and favour-

able notice God takes of the good man, every day, and all the day; and, therefore, by parity of reason, while he acts in character, every hour of his life. This is strongly intimated in the concluding words, where it is said, *his inheritance shall be for ever;* i. e. however God may, at present, seem to neglect him, and that, perhaps, day after day, and year after year too, he will balance all at last; for he lays up an inheritance, an everlasting inheritance for him: at length it will be bestowed, and whatever his days on earth may be, he will be for ever great, and rich, and happy, in possessing *that inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and which fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him.* To this, I doubt not, that these words refer; whatever intermediate reference they may possibly have to the favourable manner in which, especially under the Mosaic dispensation, God might watch over the good man's temporal concerns. This is the general sense of my text, and in treating further upon it, I shall first illustrate, and then improve, the great truth which it exhibits; that God's gracious and favourable eye is ever upon the good man, so as that he knows and observes in a

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friendly manner, the various circumstances in which he is; and what little I have further to say concerning his everlasting inheritance, I shall bring in towards the conclusion of the whole.

I. For the illustration of the general truth which the words lay down.

And before I proceed to this, I must briefly observe the character given of the good man: he is called the upright, or the sincere, as the word may import. It is particularly taken from the property of precious stones to be without flaw, and, accordingly, for one of those excellencies pointed out in those that were set in the breastplate, which I apprehend were called Urim, from their lustre; and Thummim, from their being entire, or without a flaw: and thus it properly signifies that freedom from all allowed guile and deceit, which rendered the character of a good man true sterling, if I may be allowed the expression: he has, indeed, his imperfections, and he laments them; but he is really what he professes to be, and he sincerely desires to be completely and entirely good.

He has respect to all God's commands,

esteems all God's precepts concerning all things to be right, and *he hates every false way.* SERM. IX.

The inward temper of his heart, before God, is what he professes before men; and he desires at all times, and in all circumstances, to maintain a consistency of character; he would follow every thing that is right, and would avoid every thing that is wrong, how pleasant or how profitable soever it may appear; and this uniform tenor of real goodness he desires to maintain in humble dependence upon Divine grace, like Caleb and Joshua, who *followed the Lord fully.* And as he searches himself that there may be no secret hypocrisy, he submits himself to the search of God, with that eminently upright man David: *Search me, O Lord, and try my heart, prove me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

This is his character; but then I must add, it is not so entirely his character as to exclude an humble sense of his own imperfections, and a thankful acceptance of that gospel grace that is offered to him, and of that righteousness and strength which is

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exhibited in Christ; which is so plainly laid down in the gospel, that no upright man, no man who fairly and honestly inquires into the declaration God has made of himself and his will, and the way of acceptance with him, can, upon the whole, mistake it, however he may be more or less happy in expressing his conceptions relating to it, or his manner of explaining particular scriptures in which it is taught.

Such is the upright man; and many such upright persons, I am persuaded, I am now addressing. Now with regard to such, we will a little consider a few useful and agreeable truths which are comprehended in this general proposition, that *the Lord knows their days.* And here there are two leading thoughts, which we will a little more particularly discuss. He knoweth how *all* their days are employed, and he knoweth the various events that every day occur to them.

I. He knows how all their days are employed.

He views them in their devotions, both stated and occasional; in their secular callings; in their hours of necessary relaxation; and in their efforts to promote his interest in

the world, according to their respective situations. I might mention many other particulars, but shall propose these only, as specimens according to which you may enter into many additional reflections.

1. God views the upright man in the devotions of every day, whether stated or occasional.

Devotion is one of the first and last things which the eye of God discerns, in every day, of a truly upright and good man. It were absurd to suppose that *he should live without God in the world.* They are not the upright that say, *Who is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit shall we have if we pray unto him?* but persons of a very different character. *The Lord knows that the upright*, if some very pressing case indeed do not prevent, or some sudden accident that puts them out of their usual course, will lift up their eyes unto him as soon as they open them to the light of the new born day. *When I am awake*, says David, *I am still with thee:* desirous to season my heart to the early remembrance of thee, and an early and deep sense of thy great goodness.

When the good man enters into his cham-

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ber and shuts his door, and *prays to his Father that is in secret, his Father sees in secret*[2]. He hears the voice that does but whisper to him, and hears it with pleasure; and owns it as a proof of that uprightness and integrity of soul which cannot be contented with an external form, if a proper homage be not paid to the eye of God by such secret retirements. God knows the sincerity with which the humble soul renews the dedication of itself to him, puts itself under his protection, lays hold of his covenant, submits to his will, places all its interests and possessions before him, to be disposed of by him; all its powers and capacities to be employed for him. He knows all its solemn adorations, and humble confessions, and fervent petitions, and affectionate intercessions, and ardent praises. And when the word of God is read daily, God observes what a delight the upright man has in it; with what attention he meditates upon it day and night; how cordially it is turned into prayer, and every precept, and every promise, echoed back by the voice of obedience and faith. That lively dependence upon Christ, that tender sense of obligations to him, which will make a part of

[2] Matt. vi. 6.

these secret addresses, is known and observed by God; and the upright soul is made accepted in the Beloved. When after these secret duties are dispatched, the good man calls his family together to social worship, and there renews those holy actings of soul, the Lord knows it; as he says, *I know Abraham that he will command his children and his household after him;* and when the evening homage is paid in the family and the closet, and the mercies of the day acknowledged, and the sins of the day humbly confessed, the Lord sees, pardons, and accepts.

He knows the good man's lying down, as well as his rising up; and, as every devout ejaculation which had arisen in the course of the day, in the midst of business, and labour, and care, was observed and accepted; so even the last broken efforts of devout affection, when the rational powers are so near losing themselves in sleep, that they are scarce to be called rational; are not despised, but the willingness of the spirit accepted amidst the overpowering weakness of the flesh. In this sense, the Lord knows the days of the upright, and all the humble sincere devotion, stated and occasional, that

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runs through them: and permit me, in one word, further to remind you, that when whole days are given to devotion, when the common concerns of life are laid aside, that every hour from the dawning to the closing light, may be given to God, as far as the necessities of their animal nature will admit; we may assure ourselves that the Lord knows such days, distinguishes them with double pleasure, and commands upon them, as it were, redoubled blessings.

2. The Lord knows all those parts of the day which the upright man spends in the pursuit of his secular calling.

It is his will, that, in whatever calling any man is called, in that he should abide with God; and God approves him in it. The plowing of the wicked is sin; but as the good man writes upon the bells of his horses, as the prophet speaks, *holiness to the Lord;* God reads the inscription as distinct as that on the mitre of the high priest. God sees his diligence in his calling; how careful he is not to throw away his time by long intermission of business, or by dreaming over it; in which sense it is true, with regard to time as well as substance, that *he that is slothful*

in his business, is a brother to him that is a great waster. God also sees his integrity in his business, and how solicitous the good man is that he may not suffer any dishonest gain to cleave to his hands, even where he has the fairest advantage, and man would not discern the fraud; nay, he says, but *does not God know? shall not he search it out, who knows the secrets of the heart?* God knows the submission in the mind of the good man, though his employment may be mean, though it may be servile, though it may subject him to the will, and, sometimes, perhaps, to the unreasonable will of another; yet he sees how he acquiesces in the wise hand that allotted his part, and that puts all to a future account; and prepares so much honour for this humility and patience, and this care, which you know is particularly spoken of servants, to adorn the doctrine of God, their Saviour, in all things. And, to add no more, God knows the good intention with which all is done: which leads me to add,

3rdly. That God knows the upright in those hours of necessary recreation which make a part of every day. God knows our

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frame, and he does not require an attachment either to devotion or business, which he knows in present circumstances to be impossible. He that has made such a variety of good things is willing that we should enjoy them; that we should eat, and drink, and enjoy the good of our labours; that we should allow ourselves necessary repose upon our beds, and he draws the curtain of the night around us, on purpose that we may sleep more sweetly and comfortably; blessed be his holy name for it. And, as the upright man has his good leave and blessing in these refreshments, so he observes with pleasure the temper with which they are sought; not merely for themselves, but for God; according to that great comprehensive rule, that takes in our nights as well as our days, *whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* And such a reasonable conduct is more pleasing to him, than those religious severities which would emaciate the flesh, and break the spirits, and make his children look like so many slaves under an Egyptian taskmaster.

4. The Lord knows the days of the upright

in their daily efforts to promote his cause and kingdom in the world, and to advance the happiness of their fellow-creatures. SERM. IX.

The heart of every liberal man will be devising liberal things; and the heart of every pious man will be devising pious things; and the God of love sees it with pleasure. It is the image of himself formed in the soul, by the hand of his grace, and he delights to see it; —to see those noble powers of nature, which will be our glory or our shame according as they are used or abused, improved to great and good purposes. He knows the kind and generous disposition that reigns in the heart of the good man; the compassion which he feels for the miserable, whoever they be; and the strong desire that, on the very first sight of distress, springs up to do something for its relief. The good man may, and often does, contrive to conceal his liberality from his fellow-creatures; instead of boasting of *a false gift*, as Solomon well expresses it, he covers a real gift, and endeavours that *his left hand shall not know what his right hand does;* but those alms, as well as prayers, which *are in secret his Father sees, and will reward openly.* He sees, likewise, that generous self-denial

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which he sometimes submits to, in food, in dress, in external appearance, that he may have something to spare for charitable purposes. He sees the tender workings of heart which arise from the sight of distress which he cannot relieve, otherwise than by praying for the afflicted, to Him whose stores of bounty are inexhaustible, as being supplied by omnipotence. And I should be wanting to my subject if I did not observe; that there are charities of which the rich and poor may be equally the proper objects; and I mean, not merely with respect to bodily pains, or anguish and distress of mind felt in consequence of any unhappy turn which affairs may take, by which, as well as by diseases of body, the wealthy are as liable to suffer as any others; but with regard to their spiritual concerns. The Great Father of our spirits knows the compassion and love which one immortal spirit bears to another. He sees that part of the days of the upright which is employed in a desire to be, in their humble sphere of subordination to the great Redeemer and Saviour, the saviour of souls; by spreading the knowledge of God, particularly in the rising generation, and *training*

up young ones *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;* by bearing up the honour of true religion in the world amidst the various attempts that are made to overbear and discredit it; by watching the favourable moment to cherish and cultivate any good impressions which may at certain times be made upon the mind of those that are about them, that the seed of grace may spring up; by attempting to animate and encourage those that are bowed down, to strengthen the hands and confirm the zeal of those who appear in good earnest in religion, but do not exert themselves to the degree that might be expected. In these, and a variety of other cares and labours for the kingdom of God and cause of Christ, and the salvation of souls, good men are often engaged, and, while their days are thus spent, God knows and approves them. Thus he knows how all their days are employed; but I must add,

II. He knows all the events which every day occur to them. And here I shall a little more particularly illustrate the thought in these three views; he sees the days of their

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prosperity, the days of their affliction, and the day of their dissolution.

1. He knows the days of their prosperity. All the enjoyments and comforts that make their days prosperous come by his appointment. *Thou crownest the year with thy goodness*, says David; *the eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season*[3]. *Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit*[4]. *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over*[5].

[3] Psa. cxlv. 15.

[4] Job x. 12.

[5] Ps. xxiii. 5.

It is delightful to enter into the thought, not only that God ordained that general law by which the corn, and wine, and oil are produced, and the various blessings of human life supported; but that his providence interposed in making provision for his people. When a good man sits down to his table, whether it be more plentifully or more sparingly spread, he is refreshed from the hands of God, who always intended that that very portion of good which he then receives should be used and enjoyed by him. When he goes out on a journey, and prospers in his way, it

is God that preserves him *in his going out and his coming in.* All the joy that overflows in a well turned mind, on a view of nature in all its ornaments and delights, was intended for this very person who enjoys it, by God, who is pleased with the notice that he takes of them, and the gladness of heart he perceives in them; as it is said, *he takes pleasure in the prosperity of his servants:* and when the good man lies down upon his bed, calm and serene, and resigns himself to gentle slumbers, *God gives his beloved sleep;* and his watchful eye looks upon him, if I may so speak, with a paternal complacence, as a parent on his sleeping child. And thus, I may say, God knows the nights as well as the days of the upright; yea, and in a figurative sense, the night of his afflictions; such dark scenes that turn day, as it were, into midnight; which I was,

2. Next to observe; the Lord knows the days of his adversity and distress.

How many soever, how dark and how tedious soever, he knows them all; sees all those afflictions which the eyes of other men see, and sometimes see without compassion; yea, and those secret sorrows which are, per-

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haps, cautiously concealed from almost every other eye, and so are ready to prey, as it were, inwardly upon the very vitals. As David says, *my secret groanings are not hid from thee.* Those afflictions which wring the heart with an anguish, to all others unknown, are intimately known unto God, and the good man's tears he puts into his bottle. Though to an eye of sense God may seem to have forgotten, and to stand afar off in times of trouble, yet he is present, he is near; and he has just, and kind, and gracious reasons even for the delay of his immediate interposition. He sits by as a refiner, when the furnace seems to be overheated. As Job so appositely says, *he knows the way that I take, and when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.* Yea, I must add once more,

3. God knows the day of dissolution, the day when the upright man is to take his last farewell of human life; that important, dying day, the Lord knows it. He dies by God's appointment; the time and the manner of his death are under his gracious notice and direction. And God is near in the whole process of that sad solemnity.

When the efforts of friendship and art are

defeated, and those of prayer seem to be defeated too, it is God that in love defeats them. When the upright man seems most deserted; when he pants, and faints, and expires, God is near him; when he says, for the last time, *Father, into thine hand I commend my spirit*, he receives it with the heart of a father; he takes the departed spirit, *gathers it to himself*, as the scripture speaks: and how does he dispose of it? O! there, sirs! there is a bright scene opening, which I must not pursue, though it lies so near, in my very text. But much is there said in a little; *his inheritance shall be for ever.* When the Christian lies pale and breathless, when he has no more property here, no more part in any thing that is done under the sun; when his face is veiled, to be beheld by man no more, his coffin fastened up, and carried out, and his corpse laid in the dark grave, where *as a rotten thing he consumes*, and *as a garment that is moth-eaten*[6]; when days are no more to him, the opening morning, and the bright noon, and the serene evening undistinguished from midnight gloom; yet even then does he go to inherit substance, and looks back upon this world of shadows

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[6] Job xiii. 28.

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with a secret exultation, "Blessed be God that I have done with it for ever!" and so he passes to an everlasting day, to *that light which is sown for the righteous:* and when all this visible face of nature, that so long survived him, and looked so gay, when he seemed to be lost out of it, is turned into one common sepulchre; when *the sun is turned into darkness, and the moon into blood;* he will shine on, yea, he will then shine brightest of all. His inheritance shall be for ever; for he is one of those to whom the Lord of glory shall say, *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

And now, to conclude all only with a hint of improvement, which I must not pursue: what instruction, and what consolations does this survey afford?

What instruction? Who would not wish to be upright indeed? to be known of God to be so? who would not resolve to hold fast his integrity, whatever it may cost him, and not to remove it even till he dies? that God may know him in this view; that God may view him with such delight; that he may be

able, on the other hand, to lift up, as it were, the eye of his soul, and meet that of a favouring, an approving God? O my soul! let thy days be upright; not days of fraud, days of vanity, days of sensuality, days of idleness, but days of uprightness, that this happiness may be thine! SERM. IX.

And on the other hand, what consolation must this afford to an upright man in all events, and in every circumstance! *The Lord knows all his days;* every event, and action, and thought in them. What a consolation, in particular, when men censure him! when they impute his best actions, as they often will, to the worst principles; and charge him with things, at the price of which he would not ransom his life; what a pleasure to think that *God knows all his days!* his secret tendency of heart to him, his secret benevolence of heart to all the world, and towards those very enemies that censure and revile him! and when he is reduced to the lowest state in this world, has no inheritance here, hardly *where to lay his head*, or the subsistence of the next day in his hand; what a delight to think, "Well, but there is *an inheritance that*

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shall be for ever! I am straitened now, but I shall be shortly in the full possession of my estate, and then I shall never lose it; I shall never be incapable of relishing the delight which it will afford; for my inheritance is not shining metal, or dark mould, or corn, or wine, or oil; but *the Lord is my portion*, says my soul, therefore will I hope in him; *the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!* May it be your case, and mine; and we shall congratulate ourselves and each other through eternal ages. Amen!

SERMON X.

OF BEHOLDING TRANSGRESSORS WITH GRIEF.

PSALM cxix. 158.

I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved.

I KNOW not a passage in the Old Testament which gives us a more sublime idea of that glorious improvement which is to be made in the church by the pouring out of the Spirit in the latter days, than when it is said, *He that is feeble amongst them shall be as David*[1]. And it is much to the honour of that illustrious saint that it is immediately added, *and the house of David as an angel of the Lord.* As if David were a kind of medium between the human and the angelic natures. And though it is most natural to interpret this passage as more immediately referring to the military virtues of that royal hero, yet, whoever surveys his history, and especially his writings, will find that his piety was equal to his bravery; and that he was still more emi-

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[1] Zech. xii. 8.

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nent and amiable under the character of a saint, than famous as a soldier or a king. It is by the peculiar indulgence of God *to us, on whom the ends of the earth are come*, that so many of his writings are transmitted to us which breathe a spirit of piety and zeal, of humanity and goodness by no means to be paralleled in all the poetical composures of the heathen world. I have now singled out one branch of his character as delineated by himself; not published to the world with the mean purpose of attracting human applause, but breathed out by him in the presence of that God, whom he himself represents as searching all hearts, and discerning the imaginations of the thoughts. *I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved.*

In the former verses he had been humbly representing the circumstances of danger to which he was exposed by the number and violence of his enemies, who, with restless malice and insatiable rage, had long continued their persecution against him: *Many are my persecutors and mine enemies;* but he comforts himself in this, that he had not declined from God's precepts, nor allowed himself to go out of the way of his duty even to

obtain the greatest advantage against them, when Providence seemed to have delivered them into his hands. And he here adds that, notwithstanding all he had suffered by them, he was not so much transported with resentment against them on account of personal injuries received, as overwhelmed with a pious sorrow, by reflecting on the dishonour they brought to God, and the injury they did to themselves: *I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved.*

It is this branch of the character of David that I now propose to enlarge upon as the limits of our time will permit; and shall endeavour,

I. More particularly to describe the temper which he expresses in the words of the text.

II. To show how reasonable it is that it should be our temper; that we, beholding transgressors, should be grieved.

III. Shall further illustrate the subject by the mention of some particular circumstances of some transgressors, which render them the objects of peculiar compassion.

IV. And then conclude with some inferences from the whole.

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I hope that God is witness to my sincere desire, by what I am now to say, to promote the purposes of practical religion by awakening in myself and in you a temper of mind with regard to a sinful world about us which is in its own nature highly reasonable (would to God it were less so!) and may, in its consequences, be beneficial both to us and to others! I implore the Divine assistance in the prosecution of so important a subject; and, as I know that the success entirely depends on God, would humbly recommend it to his blessing and the operation of his gracious Spirit.

I. I am, in the first place, to describe the temper which David expresses in the words of the text: *I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved.*

And, as a foundation for what is further to be said, it may be proper to take notice that the word which we render grieved has a very strong signification, and is here in a very expressive form. The root from which it is taken sometimes signifies sorrow, and sometimes indignation, and sometimes abhorrence, as the consequence of both. It is used in

scripture to express God's indignation against the sins of Israel in the wilderness, *when he was grieved forty years with the generation:* thus Psalm xcv. 10; and the penitent's grief and displeasure in reflecting on his own sin, Ezek. vi. 9. *Ye shall loathe yourselves in your own eyes;* and Job's fatigue and anxiety of spirit under the heavy pressure of his calamity, Job, x. 1. *My soul is weary of my life.* And the Hebrew doctors tell us that it sometimes signifies a controversy with offenders in a legal way, in order either to reclaim, or punish, or both; but I confess I do not find it used in that sense in the Bible. In the form in which it here stands, it signifies what is commonly called a reflex act, and imports that he set himself to grieve and afflict his own soul on account of the transgressors. The apostle translates the word in another form by προσωχθισα, which signifies a high degree of displeasure, and the LXX render it by εξεβηκομην, I melted away. But Tremellius, whose version I cannot but look upon as the best which I have ever met with, gives it a further force than any English word I can think of will do, *fastidio meipsum torqueo*, I afflict myself with indignation and grief.

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Some understand the words, q. d. I beheld them, and immediately was grieved; as soon as I saw them, my soul was touched and pierced with the sight. Others would render it, I looked upon them with grief, q. d. I often endeavoured to fix my thoughts on this melancholy scene, that I might be deeply affected with it, and enter into it with a proper seriousness and concern. The transgressors, of whom he here speaks, were, no doubt, habitual and customary sinners. I can recollect nothing else that can be material to fix the exact sense of the text. Upon the whole, I apprehend the temper which he expresses may be thus described:

It is a just mixture of indignation and tender sorrow, arising from an attentive survey of the character and condition of wicked men, attempered by other branches of a pious disposition of mind, and improved to some rational and useful purposes. This was the temper of David, and this is the temper I would recommend to you. Excuse me that I dwell for a few minutes on the parts of this description.

1. This is a mixture of indignation and sorrow. Indignation, the word most strongly

expresses, and the occasion evidently requires; and this David carries so far as not only to say, *Am I not grieved with them that rise up against thee?* (the same word that is used in the text) but further, *do I not hate them that hate thee*[2]*?* Yet still it is such an indignation as fixes on the crimes, not on the persons of the sinners, and carries along with it a tender sorrow, inseparable from love in such circumstances, to think that unhappy creatures should act so foolish and so fatal a part with regard to themselves. This is most pathetically and beautifully expressed, Psalm cxix. 136, *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.* SERM. X.

[2] Psalm cxxxix. 21.

2. This grief must arise from an attentive survey of the character and condition of wicked men. It is not a wild torrent of passion, that is raised mechanically, and discharges itself for it knows not what; but a rational, thoughtful, composed grief; and therefore so much the more awful and venerable. A grief something like that of the Son of God, when being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he still supported his character in the highest decency, and acted with the greatest regularity and beauty in the

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cure of the man who had the withered hand, in the sight of the synagogue. It supposes a rational sense of the nature of sin, in what it consists; and of the evil of sin, of the displeasure of God against it, and of the danger to which impenitent sinners are exposed by it. It is a grief that is supported by reason, and supported by faith too, and raised and adjusted by the discoveries which the gospel has made both with regard to the future judgment, and to the eternal world.

3. It must be a grief consistent with, and attempered by other branches of a pious disposition of mind; and particularly a submission to God, and a complacency in him.

It must be regulated by a due submission to God. Our grief for the wickedness, and for the consequent misery of sinners, must never rise so high as to lead us into bold expostulations with God; why is it not prevented? why he does not exert that secret, but powerful influence, that almighty healing touch, that would surely and immediately cure all the diseases of the most degenerate mind, and diffuse, in a moment, health and joy, virtue and happiness throughout all the rational creation! It is an unquestion-

able difficulty; but we should not perplex ourselves with it, nor aggravate it to our own minds, till it produce a disgust of God, and a base suspicion, as if he were not really as good as we could wish him to be: for that is in effect making ourselves better than He. But even while we are grieving for the sins of men, and longing and labouring for their reformation and happiness, there should still be an acquiescence in the present scheme of Providence, as on the whole fittest for God to choose. We should charge the fault entirely on man, and the abuse of human liberty; and not on the defect of Divine assistance. And, though we see that the end will be the eternal destruction of many of our fellow-creatures, though we may grieve, yet we must not murmur; but rather adore and congratulate the triumph of a righteous, and on the whole, no doubt, a useful and needful severity, saying, as the triumphant church does on the appearance of the angels who had the last plagues that filled up the wrath of God, *Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, O thou King of saints*[3]*!*

[3] Rev. xv. 3.

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And further, our grief for the sins of others is not to destroy our holy complacence and joy in God, as our God. This is the duty of every good man. David knew it to be so, when he said, *Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous;* and practised it, when he cried out on so many occasions, *I will rejoice and be glad in the Lord, in God my exceeding joy.* A child may grieve for the irregularities and misfortunes of an unhappy brother, and have a true fraternal concern for him, while yet he rejoices in the prosperity of the rest of the family, and finds a daily flow of pleasure in conversing with a kind, bountiful, and venerable father. The precepts of the Divine word are consistent with each other, and they are to be taken in such consistency; and it would be absurd in recommending any branch of the Christian temper, to speak of it as if it were the whole, and were to employ all our thought and all our care.

4. Our grief for the sins of others must be directed to some valuable and useful purposes.

It is one of the most absurd and dangerous mistakes relating to practical religion, to imagine that transports of mind are to be

sought merely for themselves; and to be rested in, as if they were virtue and goodness. Our concern for transgressors should awaken our endeavours to help them; otherwise, were *rivers of tears to run down our eyes*, they would be rivers of weakness and folly; and flow to no imaginable purpose, but to drown our comforts, and aggravate our neglect of duty. If a general famine, or prevailing sickness were abroad, and we could do something toward relieving the public necessities, and should sit down and weep over them, would it not look like vile hypocrisy, rather than real friendship? David's sorrow for the wicked was not such; for, when comforted by a sense of forgiving love, he taught transgressors God's ways, in lessons which still remain for the instruction of every rising generation; and made it his real care that *sinners might be converted unto him*[4].

[4] Psa. li. 13.

I have thus offered you some hints which, I hope, may be sufficient to explain the temper I would now recommend, which I judged absolutely necessary in order to make way for what I had further to offer.

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II. How reasonable it is that we should cultivate this temper in ourselves; and when we behold transgressors, should be grieved. And here I shall only argue from the dishonour that is offered to God, the injury which they do to the world, and the calamity and ruin which they are bringing upon themselves.

1. We ought to be grieved when we behold transgressors, in regard to the dishonour which is done to God and to religion. If we be, indeed, by regenerating grace made the children of God, we shall surely have a love for our heavenly Father; and this love will produce a zeal for his interest, and a concern for his honour in the world. While others so tenderly feel for themselves, and are so delicate with regard to every thing that affects their honour, or crosses their humour; we, as the scripture expresses it, shall *be jealous for the Lord of Hosts;* and that jealousy will inspire us with *grief, when we behold transgressors.* Sin is most evidently an affront to him; for the very notion of it is this, as described by St. John, *It is a transgression of the law*[5], and, by consequence, a reflec-

[5] 1 John iii. 4.

tion on the Author of it. And in this view David regarded it when it appeared to him so grievous a thing: *I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved, because they kept not thy law.* Now, this is apparently a very melancholy case: that the great God of heaven and earth should have condescended so far as to set up his kingdom among men; that he should take them for his subjects, and give them laws for the conduct of their lives; and that those laws should be violated with contempt. That a government, established on such equitable foundations, and tempered with so much lenity and sweetness, should be despised, and that men should imagine that they are asserting a valuable liberty, and acting a very heroic part, when they *break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from them.* This is, indeed, mournful! but the matter appears in a still more melancholy view, when we consider that sin is the contempt of the gospel too, and therefore is called in scripture, what I cannot mention without horror, *a trampling upon the blood of the covenant, as an unholy thing.* And can a Christian see this without grief? Can we that have with joy ventured our own souls on

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gospel grace as our own remedy, and our only hope, can we stand with indifference and behold that grace despised? A Redeemer's love, the wonder of saints on earth, and the song of angels in heaven, treated by wretched mortals, who are sinking to hell without it, as a needless, useless, worthless thing? Can we see the Lord Jesus Christ addressing sinners with so much tenderness, and, with so sweet yet powerful an importunity, entreating them to be happy; offering the most valuable blessings, and blessings purchased with the richest of his blood, and yet at the same time slighted and overlooked for every little trifle that opposeth itself to him? Can we without grief behold the blessed Spirit waiting so long upon sinners, attempting them so often, yet, with regard to multitudes, still attempting them in vain; while his motions are quenched, and he grieved, and provoked at length finally to withdraw? An affront thus offered to every person of the sacred Trinity; an injury offered to the love of a Saviour, as well as the authority of a supreme legislator, is just matter of indignation and sorrow.

2. We ought to be *grieved when we behold*

transgressors, on account of the injury which they do to the world. SERM. X.

It is apparent that by the irregularity of their behaviour, and by the neglect of the proper duties and offices of life, they rob the world about them of that benefit which they might otherwise have expected from them. It is needless to attempt to show at large how much the comfort of families, and sometimes of much larger societies, depends upon the conduct of single persons, how happy they might make it by their wisdom and goodness; and on the contrary, how much calamity and misery they bring upon it by their wickedness and folly. Nor are the pernicious effects confined within a narrow circle. How many are corrupted by their perverse insinuations, or infected by their sinful example, the contagion of which often spreads wide around, and flows from man to man with continually increasing malignity? Nor may it be improper to add farther upon this head, what might indeed have been mentioned under the former, that, whatever the sentiments of transgressors are in matters of religion, they are like to be mischievous to those with whom they converse. It is more than possi-

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ble that many of them may seek a refuge from the accusation of an evil conscience, and the dreadful fear of a future punishment, in a disbelief of the truth of Divine revelation: and we generally see that such persons are studious of propagating their uncomfortable opinions, though one can imagine no interest which they have in it, but that of hardening themselves by confederating numbers against those anxious fears which they have not yet worn off. But if the profligate creature goes on to maintain a profession of religion, to what purpose does he maintain it but to bring it under the greater disgrace, and to prejudice the minds of others against it, as being consistent with such apparent irregularities? So that, as it is expressed elsewhere, *the name of God by means of such is evil spoken of* among unbelievers, not only to the dishonour of the Divine Being, but too much to the great damage of the souls of men.

3. We ought to *grieve when we behold transgressors*, on account of the ruin they are bringing upon themselves.

As they dishonour God, and injure the world, so, by an inseparable consequence,

they greatly damage themselves: and, while they are actuated by a blind and irregular self-love, are indeed their own greatest enemies. So says the Divine wisdom, *He that sins against me wrongs his own soul*[6]; and this in no little and inconsiderable degree, but so highly, as that it may properly be added, *all they that hate me love death.* It is a capital error; for God has said, *the soul that sins shall die;* and our Lord Jesus Christ represents all impenitent sinners that reject the gospel, whatever their characters may be in other respects, as already under condemnation, and in a state of death. *He that believeth not the Son is condemned already;* he stands liable to the execution of a sentence of wrath on account of his former sins, and his unbelief greatly increases the guilt, and will greatly inflame the reckoning. And can we see such a one and not be grieved? If we see criminals under sentence of death by human laws, how notorious soever their crimes may have been, we view them with compassion: And is not the Divine condemnation infinitely more dreadful? The sentence of him who, *after he has killed, can*

[6] Prov. viii. 36.

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in circumstances like these, and are unconcerned only when we see them in danger of eternal death.

But further, to awaken our zeal and our tenderness on this head, let us recollect that we were once in the same condemnation. As the apostle argues in another place, *We also were sometime foolish and disobedient;* but Divine mercy has awakened us, reclaimed us; and shall not we who know what it is to be in a state of sin, and in danger of eternal misery, we who have seen the terrors of it, we who have been so highly indebted to sovereign grace for restoring us, shall not we have pity on those who are still in those unhappy circumstances in which we originally were, and should still have been, had not the voice, the hand, the power of God interposed between us and approaching destruction? These are considerations of common importance, and they may abundantly prove that when we look on transgressors we ought to be grieved; and shall be so, if we have a religious zeal for the honour of God, a generous concern for the happiness of the world about us, or any sentiments of compassion for them in particular;

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seeing by their obstinate and impenitent transgressions they dishonour God, they injure the world, and are ruining themselves.

III. I propose to hint at some cases that are peculiarly compassionate, and in which we should behold transgressors with extraordinary degrees of grief. And thus if there be any considerable number of them; if they be persons who enjoy considerable advantages for religion; have seemed in the way to it; persons who have any thing remarkably amiable in their temper and character; or those who are nearly related to us by nature or friendship. In these cases there is reason for some peculiar grief.

1. It is peculiarly grievous when we behold a multitude of transgressors.

In every one of these we have a distinct cause of grief; and the numbers making the infection of their example the stronger, we have great reason to fear for others, because the generality of mankind are so prone to follow a multitude, and especially when they do evil. To which I may add, that public guilt gives reason to apprehend public judgments: because, societies not subsisting as

such in a future state, it may seem the more necessary for God to animadvert upon them now, when they grow remarkably degenerate with regard to particular persons.

2. Their case is peculiarly compassionate, if they have enjoyed peculiar advantages for religion. If they have enjoyed the benefit of Divine revelation; if they have been the children of religious parents, instructed betimes in the knowledge of God and their duty, bred up to attend upon prayer, and early taught to pray by themselves; if they have seen amiable examples at home, and have sat for a considerable time under the most valuable instructions in public. These *are the children of the kingdom;* it is peculiarly mournful that they *should be cast out.* These are those that know their Master's will, and therefore, if they *do it not, must be beaten with many stripes.* These are they who have been lifted up to heaven by external advantages, therefore, if they perish, must they be cast down to the lowest hell. When we look on these surely we must be grieved. Especially,

3. If they have once made some promising appearance of a religious disposition. If

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they seemed to look upon instruction and worship as their privilege, rather than their burden; if, like Agrippa, they were *almost persuaded to be Christians;* if, like Herod, *they heard the word gladly, and did many things in obedience to it.* If they prayed themselves, and desired the prayers of others, and so awakened the hopes and joys of Christian parents and gospel ministers. We have been ready to say, "these are they that shall comfort us in the advance of our days: these are those who shall spread religion in the present age, and transmit it to rising generations." We said, "these shall be our comfort;" but, alas! they are eminently our grief. A disappointment in these is peculiarly melancholy; in those, who were so *nigh to the kingdom of God.* Our hearts must even bleed when we see them draw back to perdition, since we know *it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn aside from the holy commandment*[7].

[7] 1 Pet. ii. 21.

4. It is more melancholy still, if they be persons who, besides all these advantages, have still something remarkably amiable in them.

It may be, though they have lost their

appearance of serious piety, they have not lost all that is lovely. There is, it may be, an agreeable form, a piercing genius, a lively wit, an easy humour, an engaging manner, a polite behaviour, and, what is more than all these, a generous, tender, honest heart; so that, like the young man in the gospel, whom Jesus beholding loved him, *there is but one thing wanting*, and that the *one thing needful*. Who can see so many charms of nature, without lamenting the want of grace? Who would not mourn to see such a soul a stranger to God, a slave to sin, a despiser of the gospel, and, on the whole, in such a condition that the best Christianity will allow one to hope for in present circumstances is, that he will not sink so low into everlasting burning, as some other sinners; even when his condemnation for rejecting the gospel will be more intolerable than that of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment.

5. It is most compassionable of all, when persons in such circumstances are nearly related to us in the bonds of nature or friendship.

Such a relation to them, such an interest in them, makes us tenderly sensible of all

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their other interests; and shall we not much more be sensible of this? Think, my friends, have none of you a husband or a wife, a brother, or child, or friend, dear to you as your own souls, concerning whom you have reason to fear that they are impenitent transgressors? Let conscience answer; ought you not to have peculiar concern for them? I will not argue from your own interest in the regularity of their behaviour, as your temporal affairs may suffer by the contrary; nor will I argue from the account you have to give of your conduct with respect to such persons, and the methods you may have taken to bring them into the way of truth and happiness: But, separate from all these considerations, should not friendship and love impress your minds on such an occasion? You, who look upon them with pleasure and fondness, who regard them as the delight of your eyes, and the joy of your hearts; you who would tremble at the thoughts of being separated from them but a year; how can you bear the thought of an everlasting separation? or would your love lead you to bear them company in those seats of sorrow in which they are to have their abode? You

that, if you saw them go down into the grave, would almost be impatient to go down to them there, how will you endure to see them sink into hell? Oh what a parting will there be at death! Oh what a meeting at the tribunal of God!

I have insisted so much on these hints, that I must but briefly touch on those inferences and reflections which may naturally be drawn from what I have now been saying, and which are the matter,

IV. Of the 4th general.

1. If all have so much reason to be grieved for transgressors, then surely transgressors have the greatest reason to be grieved for themselves.

Sinners! if a compassionate regard to your happiness should touch our hearts, how much more should it touch your own to think, I am the poor wretched creature so guilty and so miserable that all, who learn to estimate things by the word of the eternal God, look upon me with grief. I am the creature that dishonours God; that injures the world; that am ruining my own soul. It is a sad case: may God represent it to

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you in its true colours, and you will see and know how evil it is! But, blessed be God! though sad, it is not hopeless. Though you are transgressors, the God with whom you have to do has proclaimed himself by this title, that *he is merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and in truth; forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin:* and there is a Redeemer who has made an atonement, and is *making intercession for the transgressors.* Fly to him with an humble sense of sin, and a sincere desire of accepting him in the gospel way, and your grief shall end in eternal joy; and your conversion will gladden those whom your transgressions have grieved. Your friends will rejoice; the church will rejoice; nay, it will spread an additional joy over the heavenly regions, where grief could never enter; for our Lord expressly tell us that *there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth*[8].

[8] Luke xv. 7, 10.

2. If we have so much reason to be grieved for transgressors, what reason have we to rejoice in that Redeemer by whom they are recovered and saved.

We pity them, I hope many of us at least; but, alas! ours is a poor impotent pity. It

can weep over them, it can exhort them, it can *say to these dead bones, live!* but, alas! what efficacy can it give to those exhortations? or what assurance could it have given of their acceptance, or of our own, had not the Lord Jesus Christ discovered it to us? But in him we behold the most amiable mixture of power and tenderness; his is an almighty compassion, that often saves where it pities. When on earth, he beheld transgressors, and was grieved. He wept over them; nor did he weep only over a lost world, he bled and died; nor did he bleed and die in vain. Ten thousand dead sinners have been awakened; ten thousand guilty creatures have been justified; ten thousand polluted wretches have been cleansed and renewed: ten thousand once condemned by God, and condemned by their own conscience, are now raised by him to fill the places of angels, and for ever surround the throne of God. To him we owe it, that, while we attempt to awaken sinners, we can direct them to help; to him, in whom our hope is for them, and for ourselves. *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice.*

SERM. X. Rejoice in him as the Saviour of all men, and especially of those who believe; and, while you mourn the transgressions of an ungodly world, encourage your hope in his covenant of grace.

3. If there be reason to be grieved on account of impenitent transgressors, what reason is there to rejoice that all are not of this character.

It is true, *all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;* nor can any say, I am pure from all transgression. Yet, through the riches of Divine grace, there are some who are separated from the pollutions of a wicked world, and faithfully devoted to the service of God. Some that have presented *their bodies and souls living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God;* and who, though surrounded with many imperfections, and still mourning over the remainder of sin, are yet *pressing towards the prize of the high calling of God in Christ.* My friends! we ought to rejoice in this. In the first place, should we rejoice, if, through the Divine goodness, we hope that this is our own case; that we are *plucked as brands out of the burning;* and, though

once afar off, are now brought nigh by the blood of the cross. But our joy ought not to be confined to ourselves: we ought to breathe forth our souls in grateful acknowledgments to God that there are so many more, whom he has saved and *called with an holy calling;* some who are as *the lights of the world, and the salt of the earth;* and who, conscious of the dignity of their relation, and the excellence of their hope, behave in some degree *as the children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.* It is matter of abundant thankfulness, it is matter of praise, that God has raised up to himself any of the children of fallen Adam to be a seed to serve him, and to *be accounted to him for a generation.* And we should peculiarly acknowledge his goodness, that amongst us, degenerate as we are, the Lord of Hosts has left a remnant that appears to be reserved unto himself; while they are endeavouring to glorify God, to benefit the world, and to promote their own spiritual and eternal felicity. The same principles that engage us to behold transgressors with grief, should teach us to behold *these* with complacency and joy.

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4. If we are to behold transgressors with grief, then surely we ought to esteem it a very great favour if Providence has placed us in circumstances that may render us peculiarly helpful to them.

Those relations, whether in public or in private life, which may give us advantage for, or authority in, addressing ourselves to sinners on the great concern of their eternal salvation, should be regarded with pleasure, whatever labour and fatigue, whatever difficulty and trial, they may bring along with them. You, that are parents and heads of families, should consider this as a happy circumstance, that you, by the Divine blessing, may hope to be useful towards reclaiming your children and your servants. And as to those of us whom God has accounted faithful, putting us into the ministry, I hope and believe it is in this view that we regard it as our honour and our happiness. May God awaken our zeal both in public and private! and may he bless this (plain, hasty, inaccurate) discourse, as a means of producing so happy an effect! May he melt our hearts into holy grief and compassion when we behold transgressors! and while we are endea-

vouring to *teach them his ways, that sinners may be converted unto him*, may he strengthen our hands, and succeed our labours! that, reducing many a wandering creature from the error of his ways, we may *save their souls from death, and hide a multitude of sins!* that, *when all the wise shall shine as the firmament, we, having turned many to righteousness, may appear as the stars* with distinguished lustre, and receive from the hands of *the Chief Shepherd a crown of glory that fadeth not away!*

SERMON XI.

VARIOUS CAUSES OF RELIGIOUS DEJECTION EXAMINED.

ISAIAH, xl. 27.

Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?

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THEY who themselves live in peace and pleasure are too apt to be insensible of the afflictions of others; and what of their afflictions they do regard, are generally those which relate to temporal concerns; but the anguish of a distressed mind few indeed attend to. Where it is thought of at all, it is too often referred unto some bad cause, charged upon the fault of the mourners themselves; and rather considered as an occasion of censure than a call for compassion and assistance. But, surely, this ought not to be the character of the ministers of Christ: They ought to remember, that their master *was anointed to bind up the broken hearted,*

and *to appoint to them that mourn in Zion, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness*[1]; and, surely in this respect, *the servant is not above his Lord, nor the disciple above his master.* I well know that many are under spiritual distress; and, as I would tenderly compassionate them, I would endeavour to approve the sincerity of that compassion by my endeavours to heal and help them. To this I destine the labours of this day. The insensible sinner, the cheerful and established Christian, shall have his portion of meat at some other season: my business this day is with those who say with Jacob, who speak with Israel in my text, *My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God:* that is, who are ready to speak and act, at times, as if they thought God would not take notice of them in their painful and afflicted ways, nor interpose to give judgment in their favour when they are most oppressed by their enemy. Many circumstances, into which the Israel of God may fall, may possibly prove a temptation to such a melancholy conclusion; but if they are *Israelites indeed*, it is

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[1] Isa. lxi. 1, 2.

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always ill grounded. In cases of this kind, to find out what the foundation of this anxiety is, may be deemed no inconsiderable part of the cure: I shall, therefore, make it my whole business this day,

I. To inquire into the causes of religious dejection and distress; hinting, under each, some things by way of cure: and then,

II. Shall conclude with a reflection or two.

There is balm in Gilead, there is a physician there. Oh! that the health of God's people might now be recovered! and that I may successfully attempt, with the good Samaritan, to *pour*, as it were, *wine and oil into their wounds!* Direct and bless, thou great Physician! preserve me at least from that unskilful handling them which, instead of curing, would exasperate the evil. And, ye children of affliction! refuse not to be comforted; say not that your wound is incurable; but bear the searching hand, and lift up your hearts to God, to enable you to apply every prescription which, through his blessing, may be salutary.

I. My grand business upon this head is to inquire into the causes of religious dejection, and to give some advice by way of cure.

Now, here I speak not of the remoter causes: these are frequently, a melancholy constitution of body, and wrong methods of instruction and education; in consequence of which, many of these mistaken notions are infused into the mind, and that, perhaps, by the great labour of injudicious teachers; who shed a malignant influence over the soul, almost darken its rational powers, and shut out comfort in its first entrance. But I shall here particularly treat of those views which are often the result of those unhappy causes, and yet, I hope, will not prove quite incurable.

1. One great cause of religious dejection is, that men are ready to entertain wrong notions of the blessed God.

It was well said by a heathen, that to form right conceptions of the Deity is the very foundation of all true religion. By these, to be sure, we must learn how to please him; and, for want of these, many have run into methods of expiating their offences, and attempted to avert the anger of the Deity, by which they rather tempted and provoked it. And, I fear, instances of this are to be found amongst Christians, as well

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as heathens; amongst Protestants, as well as the unhappy votaries of the Roman church.

But I am not to speak on this subject in all its extent; but of those mistaken notions of religion which may be the occasion of religious dejection. Many erroneous notions occasion dissoluteness, and encourage irregularity of life; while men think only of the Divine lenity and goodness, and seem to think that they pay a homage to God, by divesting him of the robe of holiness, and the sceptre of justice. But, there are others who dwell entirely on the awful part of the prospect, and paint the Deity in such colours that they tremble at the sight of Him. I remember to have seen a Chinese idol of some of their gods with eight or ten arms and hands, and every one of them filled with some instrument of mischief and vengeance; but shall we imagine this to be a proper emblem of Jehovah, our God? Is this the fear of God that is required? Is this a disposition that you would be pleased with in your own children? Would you wish them never to approach you but with fear and trembling; as if they imagined that you would smite them almost to death?

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There are those that, while they acknowledge the goodness of God in general, seem to imagine he has formed, as it were, some aversion to them. This seems to have been Job's temptation, when he says, *Am I a sea, or a whale*, or, as it might be rendered, a dragon, *that thou settest a watch over me*[2], as a mischievous creature, marked out for ruin, keepest thine eyes upon me, as it were, to hold me down, and bind me in with irresistible violence. And elsewhere, *Why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, aiming thine arrows at me, watching opportunities against me*[3]? Some are ready to think and speak as if God had taken some causeless aversion to them, and were determined to hunt them down to destruction; that, let them do what they can, he will destroy them. But these are most injurious representations, and it is very observable that, in the very first speech that God made to the first notoriously wicked man we ever read of, I mean Cain, he contradicts this notion, as if it were with design, and says even to him, *If thou dost well, shalt not thou be accepted? and if thou hast done evil, there is a sin-offering lying at thy door*[4]: for so, perhaps, the word should be rendered.

[2] Job vii. 12.

[3] ch. vii. 20.

[4] Gen. iv. 7.

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Let me then address myself to dejected souls, and entreat that they would endeavour to think more equitably and honourably of the blessed God, than to imagine that he delights in the destruction of his creatures, or that he is inexorably intent upon theirs. Has he not said, has he not sworn that *he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way, and live*[5]*?* yea, that he is so far from taking pleasure in destroying, that he does not take pleasure even in chastising; he does not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men. O, sirs! you cannot do justice to the amiable perfections of the Deity by your most honourable conceptions of them; but do not such gross injustice to them by such evil representations. Conceive of him as love, love in the abstract; as *the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin*[6]. Look upon creation as proceeding not only from his powerful hand, but from his benevolent heart. Creatures were formed that he might communicate happiness to them all, so far as it was fit for them to receive it. Look round upon the

[5] Ezekiel xxxiii. 11.

[6] Exodus xxxiv. 6, 7.

face of nature, and behold the good God. See his beneficence in the rays of the sun, in all the pleasure and life and joy which he imparts to the whole face of nature; and behold in him an emblem of *the great Father of lights.* Look upon the vegetable creation in all its variety, formed for the delight of inferior animals, for the use, accommodation, and comfort of man. Behold even the most uncomfortable scenes, the rain, the frost, the tempests of winter, as well as the flowers of spring and the fruits of summer and autumn, all subserving the design of his goodness, and making earth fitter to answer the merciful end intended by it. Behold God presiding as the moral Governor of the world, not that he may waste and destroy, but that he may guard and bless: that by his own patronage he may encourage goodness; our goodness to each other, as well as that gratitude and love to him in which alone we can be happy. Above all, behold his goodness in our redemption by his dear Son. Hearken to the voice of Christ when proclaiming, what he does proclaim, not only when expressly speaking of it, but in every word, in every action, in every glance of his benign and compassion-

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ate eye, his Father's goodness. Behold the Father of mercies sending down his Son from heaven to earth, that he might die for us; receiving him again from earth to heaven, that he might intercede for us: behold him as giving all power into the hand of this glorious and gracious Saviour, that he *might do whatever he pleases in heaven and upon earth* for the good of his people. Behold him sending down his Spirit from heaven, to work all manner of wonders, to procure the reception of his beneficent and saving gospel in the world, that men may be called to salvation by it. Behold him supporting through all ages the ministers of his word, that they might proclaim peace, that they might publish salvation; and sending ambassadors, which are come even to us, *beseeching us, in God's stead, that we would be reconciled to him.*

And wilt thou say, But there is no mercy for me? what reason can you have to say it? not, I am sure, from the conduct of his providence to you; for you have every one of you shared his goodness in your own persons: his hand reared you up to life, when so many died from the womb: you have had your share, your full share, of the bounties of his

providence: his sun has shone for you, his rain descended for you, his corn, and wine, and oil have sustained you, and the very habits which you now wear were the gift of his fatherly bounty. And will you say, but spiritual blessings are not for me? Nay, but you are in the house of God; his gospel is sent to you; the calls of mercy are addressed to you; and I am sure that nothing will exclude you from the blessings of God's everlasting covenant, and the inheritance of his heavenly kingdom, if you exclude not yourselves. You could not surely entertain such unkind thoughts, if you impartially studied his word! Go home, sirs, and open the book of God; and the light of his goodness will, as it were, break out upon you from every page; an assemblage of amiable ideas will appear, in one place and another, within a few lines. *The Lord is good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy to all them that call upon him. The Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting, his truth endureth throughout all generations.* Cast yourselves sincerely on that mercy, and I am as sure that you will find it as I am that he is true; for he has said, *Then shall ye seek and find me, if ye seek me with all your* SERM. XI.

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heart. You will remember you are to seek him through Christ. But here I am reminded of adding,

2. That religious dejection often arises from entertaining wrong notions of the way of acceptance with God through Christ.

As some dangerously presume upon it to their eternal ruin, so there are many that are not sufficiently aware of the overflowing freedom and abundant riches of the grace of God in the gospel. They seem to think that the compassions of Christ are intended only for those who have something considerable in them to recommend them to his favour. They forget that it is the scheme of God in one sense to justify the ungodly; that they are called to *buy milk and wine without money and without price*. It is true, indeed, it is not a scheme to save wicked men while they continue wicked, and though they go on in their sins. That were a blasphemy, which nothing can exceed; but it is as true that, if a sinner be disposed to cast himself upon the mercy of God and the unlimited act of grace which he has published in the gospel, it is not necessary that he should make himself holy before he comes to apply to Christ; but

it is the gospel scheme that we should come to Christ in the condition in which the call of his mercy finds us. What if you had been covered with a leprosy, and in the days of his flesh he had called you that you might be cleansed, would it have been just and proper to say, "I am so polluted that I am not fit to draw nigh to thee, Lord; let me first get myself cured of this leprosy, and then I will wait upon thee." You evidently see the absurdity of this; and the application is easy. You are not first to be righteous, and then to apply to Christ; but you are to come to him that you may be righteous and holy. This, therefore, is the advice I would give to the disconsolate soul, who believes the rich and abundant provision of Divine grace in the gospel; that he should cast himself, as it were, at the feet of the Son of God, and say, "Lord, I am a self-destroyed sinner, all over guilt and pollution; but, such as I am, do thou receive me; begin and carry on the cure. What thou prescribest by thy grace I will do: I will be willing to be cured in thine own way; willing to conform to thy direction in all things. Let but the work be thine, and the glory shall be thine. I would

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not *sin that grace may abound*, but I would not despair because I have sinned; nor stand at a distance from the Saviour because I am a great sinner, and greatly need him, but rather will humbly hope that *where sin has abounded, there grace shall much more abound.*" Abundant consolation has often entered, as it were, by this door.

3. Much religious dejection has arisen for want of rightly distinguishing between the first principles of the Divine life and the highest improvement of it.

It is true, indeed, that the most eminent attainment is desirable; but the growth of grace, like that of nature, is gradual. There may be a principle of true religion in the heart, and yet it may be far short of maturity; as there is a vast difference between a newborn infant and the vigour of the full grown man. From the moment a man casts himself at the feet of Christ with a sincere and prevailing desire to be saved by him in his own way, that is, in the way of holiness, he is, according to the tenour of the word of God, entitled to the promise of mercy: but it may not be till after a course of many years that he shall have obtained that full

mastery of his appetites and passions, that firm trust and confidence in God, that deep resignation to his will, that active zeal for his glory, that generous disregard to his own interest where that of God and his fellow-creatures is concerned, which may, after all, crown the work; and especially that full assurance of the Divine love. I mention this, the rather because I know that many injudicious teachers have made assurance of the very essence of faith, meaning by assurance not a full persuasion of the power and grace of Christ in the general, but a certainty that they themselves should be saved by him; a great and grievous error, which cannot be so much as reconciled with the principles of common sense, without quite overthrowing those of scripture. For on what can this assurance be founded? on a personal revelation? Can it be imagined that every believer has an immediate revelation from God, even previous to his being a believer, that he is intended for eternal glory? And this testimony of the Spirit of God to an unbeliever is most unscriptural: if not, it must go upon the supposition of a universal salvation. And if even that were allowed, yet no man could be sure

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he should escape damnation, if there be such a thing, for the time that punishment shall endure. So that, in short, the only thing that can lay a foundation for such a universal assurance of immediate happiness through Christ, if it does not arise from the consciousness of being formed by grace to a meetness for glory, must be a hope which the devils themselves may have, and which overthrows the very first principles of Christianity, and must be as false as the gospel is true. I say this because I fear the doctrine that I oppose is one of the monsters which the present age has produced. But if we are to judge by facts as well as by reason and scripture, it is very certain that some doubts may consist with true faith. It is certain that a *man who fears the Lord*, and obeys the voice of his servant, may walk in darkness, and see no light; and it is as certain that many begin where they ought to end. There is a great deal of reason to believe that they often take the warmth of their own affections and imagination for the testimony of the Spirit of God; and, setting out with a premature assurance, they end in apostacy; whereas we see many humble souls, that go on for a long

time under a heavy burthen, and yet walk much more steadily and honourably, and end their days with more comfort to themselves, and more reputation to a Christian profession.

I must likewise add, on this head, that the notion of perfection, which many have injudiciously taught, has, I am afraid, a fatal tendency to disquiet the mind of those who have a just title to Divine consolation. They hear others talk of perfection, and find many defects in themselves, and perhaps consider not that the conceit of perfection may be owing to ignorance; and their own apprehension of many imperfections, to more exalted notions of the purity of the Divine law, and to more fervent desires after a complete conformity to it.

One part of the world little knows what another part feels, said a poor creature whose heart was almost bursting with anguish, and it has passed into a proverb.

4. True Christians often judge wrong concerning the advance of grace, and place too much in the strong working of pious affections.

In consequence of this, as many are afflicted

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because they have not immediately attained to such eminence in religion as others of a long standing, so others of a long standing and of considerable growth are ready to complain that they have not only made no proficiency at all, but that they are gone backward. How common is it to hear even aged Christians saying, *O, that it were with me as in months past!* and sometimes, because we read of being *planted in the house of the Lord, and flourishing in the court of our God*, they are ready to conclude that they are dead trees. Because it is said, the righteous shall hold on his way, and he that has clean hands shall grow stronger and stronger; *they go from strength to strength; the path of the just is like the shining light, that shineth more and more to the perfect day*[7]; they conclude that they have no part in these promises, because they are not fulfilled to them.

[7] Prov. iv. 18.

Now, with regard to this, I must observe, by the way, that where there is indeed a decline in religion with advancing years, it is a lamentable case; and yet, notwithstanding this, the promise of God may, in the general, hold good as to the advance of most, and of all, if necessary assistances are given to all.

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But it is of great importance here to observe, that many estimate their advance in grace by wrong standards; they think religion chiefly consists in the working of the passions. It is, indeed, desirable to feel holy enlargement in prayer; but the main thing about which we should be concerned is the sincerity of our hearts before God, which there may often be where there is little or no enlargement. It must be expected that the affections will, in some degree, deaden with advancing age. The main thing by which we are to judge whether we are Christians or not is the determination of the will in a course of obedience to him, or rebellion against him. The grand evidences are tenderness of conscience, a deep sense of the vanity of the world, victory over its temptations, a calm submission and resignation to the Divine will, a steady attachment of soul to the service of God in the station in which we are placed, with deep humility, renouncing all self-confidence after the greatest improvement and services. And if you find these, you have reason to thank God and go forward, though you have not the sweetest enlargement. A tree looks pleasanter in spring,

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while in all its glory of blossom, yet is more valuable in autumn, when laden with ripe fruits. What some Christians think their blasting is their ripeness. Near akin to this,

5. Many are much disquieted through too great a concern about sensible comfort from some extraordinary effusion of the Spirit of God under this character, bearing an immediate testimony to the soul.

When we consider how much the world is sunk in sensual pleasure, there may seem little need to caution persons against being too eagerly desirous of religious joy. The generality of mankind have not minds sufficiently refined to taste them; but it is not to be wondered that those who have tasted them should desire to live continually upon them; nor is it to be blamed, if it be but in a proper degree. But we are to consider that God acts herein with a sovereign freedom. He communicates consolation as he pleases, and not always in proportion to the degree in which a particular soul is dear to him. He sometimes appoints his dearest children to glorify him by bearing desertion; and we ought never to be surprised at it, when we consider who he was that

cried out in death, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* To be willing to give up sensible comforts, and to remain even in desolation of spirit, if God appoints it, is one of the highest instances of self-denial, and resignation to the will of God, that can be imagined. It is an heroical exercise with which he tries, and often increases the strength of the elder children in his family, while the little infants of it are as it were fondled upon the knee.

6. Many fall into great dejection by misinterpreting the conduct of Divine Providence to them, particularly in sending upon them some heavy affliction, or denying an answer to those importunate prayers with respect to any present interest that may have been in question.

Some are ready to conclude hard things against themselves, because they are exercised with heavy afflictions. Holy Job was, in this respect, happy in the midst of all his miseries; and, though it seems as if God had singled him out above all mortal men to make him a monument of vengeance, and though his friends concluded, not so much from his being afflicted as from the peculiar

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and unparalleled circumstances of his affliction, that he was a false hearted hypocrite in all his former religious profession, yet he himself would not let go the profession of his integrity and his confidence in it. But too many argue otherwise. They are ready to conclude that God rejects them, because he chastises them; as if they had never read, that *whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son* whom he receiveth. But surely, sirs, it is a very unfair conclusion. It was upon this very principle that the Jews went, in the harsh and blasphemous conclusion which they formed against Christ, when, as the prophet expresses it, on account of his bruises and wounds, *they esteemed him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted.* And if he, who was the Son of God, was *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*[8], let none conclude against their own adoption from these circumstances. Rather let them rejoice, in this instance, to be made conformable to their Lord; and see to it, that by bearing their affliction as he did, they bring new proofs of their relation to God from them.

[8] Isa. liii. 3.

But some argue from this consideration,

that their prayers are not heard; that they cry earnestly to God for this and that mercy, and it is denied: that they ask, perhaps, with repeated importunity the life of such a child, of such a friend, and their prayers *are poured out like water on the ground;* whereas it is said, *God will fulfil the desire of them that fear him, and will hear their cry.* It looks like a plausible conclusion from thence, therefore, since our desires are not fulfilled, since our prayers are not heard, it is too plain that we are not among those that fear the Lord. But to such souls I would reply, we must distinguish between hearing their prayers in the main, and hearing every particular petition that is offered by them. Your most earnest petitions, and those which you have been daily offering since you became the children of God, are that your sins may be forgiven, that your souls may be sanctified, that you may be enabled to persevere in religion to the end of your lives, and at length may attain eternal salvation; that God would receive your souls at death, and raise you up to eternal glory in the last day. And all these petitions God hears,

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and will answer: but he has never promised to grant every particular indulgence which his people may request: then he must give the reins of government out of his own hand; he must fail to bestow upon some of his children the most valuable blessings, because the prayers of some of their brethren must stand in the way; he must lengthen out every good man's life to an extreme old age; he must immediately take off from the back of his dearest children those rods of affliction which his tenderest love has appointed. Surely I may appeal to yourselves here: In asking these temporal blessings, have you not submitted your will to that of your heavenly Father? If you have not, then you have committed a great crime, which deserves to be chastised with much heavier strokes; if you have, were you not sincere in that submission? and if you were, it was only conditionally, that you prayed for such a mercy and such a deliverance, if it might be for the glory of God, or your own good. So that you have not room to say, upon the whole, that your prayers are not answered.

7. Another cause of spiritual dejection is,

that we are too apt to make the experience of others a test by which to judge of ourselves.

We have, it may be, heard others, in public or in private, declaring what God has done for their souls, and they have gone on in a very regular order: they have told us that, after having been long held in the chains of sin, they were awakened by such and such discourse, or providence; were kept a considerable time under deep humiliation and bitter distress, and brought almost to the borders of despair: that, after that, they endeavoured to find their help in themselves, attempted religion in their own strength, and on the footing of their own righteousness: but, after labouring a long time in vain, were led to Christ as their only hope, cast themselves upon him, and at length, perhaps after a long course of temptations, met with comfort in him: received the sealing of the Spirit, the joys of God's salvation, sat under ordinances with great delight, and were even compelled, as it were, to come and demand the children's bread.

Blessed be God when this is the case! Blessed be God when souls experience it,

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and declare it properly! I reverence the experience of Christians; I adore the work of God's Spirit, and I earnestly pray, daily, that it may be more abundantly diffused. But I fear lest Satan should sometimes get an advantage over some by these experiences of others. Dejected souls are often saying, "I know not when I was so awakened, so humbled, so terrified; at least, I am sure I never was so comforted. I never felt this witness of the Spirit with my spirit, that full assurance of faith, that evident right to the children's bread. I am a stranger to the first principles of the Divine life; I am a cumberer of the ground; I am not worthy to worship among such favourites of heaven: much less am I worthy to eat and drink with them at the table of the Lord."

My brethren! shall I speak plainly? I think there is sometimes a danger that persons may be mistaken in judging of their own experiences, and may fix upon such marks as will not stand a strict examination. I fear, in their account of high raptures, they may sometimes mistake the workings of their own spirits for those of the Spirit of God; and should wish much rather to be able to

argue from the success I found in my combat with indwelling sin, than from the greatest transport of soul in thinking on the privileges of God's people. But where these are not mistaken, it is to be remembered that God has very different ways of working upon men's hearts in bringing them home to himself, and when they are actually so brought home. He awakens some in a much more awful manner than others: he comforts some more remarkably; and there are many instances of those who walk most steadily with God, and who are the greatest ornaments to Christian societies, who, being early wrought upon by his grace, and led on gently in gospel ordinances, have few very extraordinary circumstances to report; who would not know, by looking into their own lives and experiences alone, that such struggles, or such transports ever happen as some of their brethren have to recount. In one sense, as well as in another, *there are variety of operations, but the same Spirit; the same God works all and in all.* Let us leave him to work in his own way; and, without pretending to limit the Holy One of Israel, be more

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careful in examining whether these be indeed the principles of the Divine life, than in inquiring how they entered. We none of us know what the way of the Spirit, in a natural sense, is, nor how it is that the rational soul begins to animate this material frame, which at first seems to be no more than a vegetable, and afterwards may be animal before that rational soul is united; yet we know this principle by its operation, and I pray God we may so know the principle of grace.

8. The great cause of religious dejection is the want of a becoming reverence for conscience; in consequence of which some, who have felt many religious impressions, neglect their duty, or run into practices contrary to it.

I fear this is the most common cause of all. Christians would generally have more comfort, if they had more holiness and more zeal. *Iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold.* There is very little vigour in religion, even amongst many of whom we must hope that they have some experimental acquaintance, at least, with the first princi-

ples of it. There is a great neglect of duty: God's Israel is an empty vine, and bringeth forth fruit to itself[9]. The world gains upon the hearts of professors; they are eager to get it; and they are ready to forget religion, when they do not renounce it. Their sabbaths they give to public devotion: though, perhaps, some of them are so weary with their worldly labour, that they sleep away great part of the morning, and possibly come to the house of God, and there finish the slumber which they were obliged to interrupt at home sooner than they could have wished. In the evening, perhaps, they retire a little; but either pray not with their families at all, or with very little zeal; and when the sabbath is over, they think the little restraint they have put upon themselves during the course of it, gives them a kind of right to spend the whole week in labour and amusement, with very few thoughts of God, very few discourses of a religious nature, and perhaps without any care of their families, or any attendance upon religious exercises of any kind, except it be a few broken minutes for secret prayer, which, I take it for granted, no Christian can customarily omit. He does

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[9] Hos. x. 1.

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little good with his substance: even when it is growing, there is not a tenth part laid out in charity, where, considering his wealth and family, a much larger proportion might be expected; besides this, perhaps, the infirmities of nature or strength of temptation betray a man into some actual transgressions. Possibly he falls into some degree of intemperance: he is fond of vain company; he spends a great many hours in the evening in public houses, or in diversions at home, which, if he does not think absolutely unlawful, he must know to be far beneath the dignity of the Christian character. He suffers some irregular affections to rise in his heart: he is proud; he is censorious; he is passionate; a little provocation sets him on fire; he speaks unadvisedly; lets his lips break out into indecent transports, of which, when he comes to reflect upon them, he is heartily ashamed; he resolves he will be more careful another time, but it signifies little, he is ensnared again and again. Now, when this is the case, who can wonder that there are many suspicions and fears with relation to his spiritual state? Who can wonder that there is a suspicion that the tree is dead, or

dying, when there are only withering leaves to be found upon it?

In short, sirs, when this is the character there ought to be suspicions. A temper like this ought to be inconsistent with peace and tranquillity of mind; and a confidence still maintained, in such a state as this, is like what I have heard of the insensibility in the limbs of an idiot, whose sensations were so slow, that his flesh has actually been burnt without his perceiving it. Give to me, O Lord, and to those committed to my care, a holy sensibility of soul in these respects! Let them feel the first spark of evil that falls on them, and rouse themselves, lest the burning be fatal! And may God break in pieces the harps of those unhappy seducers, who would lull them asleep in such a state, though the name of Christ our Lord should be the charm, which they teach them to resound, I had almost said, to the destruction of his kingdom; but it shall never be destroyed: I will rather say, greatly to the scandal of his cause among men.

I have now, sirs, given you a faithful view of many of the causes of religious dejection, and warned you against many mistaken prin-

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ciples, by which they are occasioned. I shall conclude the whole with some hints of improvement [which my time will not allow me to enlarge upon.]

1. Let us learn to pity, and pray for such distressed souls.

It is a case greatly to be commiserated; and, so much the rather, as Christians of amiable characters, and sometimes of considerable attainments in religion, are at times thus exercised. The mind is the seat of happiness; and the greatest plenty of external accommodations will signify little, where the spirit is wounded: yea, the kindness of tender relatives can do little, where the displeasure of God is feared. O how many, if they had freedom to speak, would be crying out, *Have pity upon me, O my friends, for the hand of God has touched me!* Let us have pity upon them; and let us consider how we shall help them. If we can do it by our advice, let us be ready to do it. But let us remember, that it is impossible to behold him if he hides his face: let us, therefore, seriously and affectionately cry unto God for them. Prayer, united prayer, has done wonders this way. And I do verily believe that

if those who have long been in darkness in this respect would open their case to some few Christian friends whom they can trust, and call in their assistance in joint prayer, the happy effects of it would be found in various respects.

2. Let souls in such a condition not refuse to be comforted and instructed.

There are some who seem, if I may use the expression, to embrace their sorrows, as if they were a treasure which they were unwilling to part with. But let me beseech you, sirs, not to thrust away the friendly assistance that is offered, nor let your souls refuse to be comforted. Take heed of rash and desperate speeches. They give an advantage to the tempter, and discourage yourselves and your friends.

Resign yourselves to God. Be willing to wait his time for comfort, and resolve that you will still continue at his feet, let the consequence be what it will. Endeavour to trust in him, as able to help, as rich in mercy towards all that call upon him. Listen with pleasure to what others have experienced in your circumstances; *the light that has risen to them in darkness;* and this, not in forsaking

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God, but in waiting upon him. They have perhaps experienced it in the house of God, or in their own houses, on their sick or dying beds.

In the mean time, endeavour to consider it as your duty to rejoice in God. Survey his lovely perfections; think with pleasure that there is such a being. Be thankful to him daily for his mercy to you; for, by giving him the glory due to his name for providential bounties, and for the messages of grace in a Redeemer, which you are sure that you have received, you may experience that which may carry you farther in his praise than you imagine that at present you have any right to go. And let me, in concluding this head, leave with you the consolation immediately following the words of my text, arising from the almighty power and boundless condescension of God: *Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint, and be weary, and the young men*

shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings, as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint[1]. SERM. XI.

[1] Isa. xl. 28—31.

3. Let those who are entire strangers to such struggles as these consider whence it comes that they are so. Is it from a stupid unconcernedness about religion; or from having found out a way to solid peace?

Perhaps, that some have been strangers to such struggles and exercises as I have now described may be owing to an entire negligence with regard to religion. Now, as to such, I must cry out, and I would do it solemnly, *Woe to them that are at ease in Zion.* Your repose is like that of a man who, in a lethargy, is sleeping himself to death. Oh! that I could see you awakened, though it were with terrors. As, where a mortification is begun, the more the surgeon loves his patient, the more he wishes his lancet to be felt, so do I wish that you might feel some of those inward distresses which I have described. Alas, sirs! if you feel not the pains of a cure, you must soon feel those of death: if you feel not the pangs of conviction, you will

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soon feel *the worm that never dies, the fire that will never be quenched.* Woe to you that now smile, that laugh in your deluded dream; you will, ere long, *mourn and weep, with wailing and gnashing of teeth. Awake*, therefore, *thou that sleepest; awake, and arise from the dead, that Christ may give thee life.*

But if the tranquillity of your mind be owing to your having found peace on solid grounds, which, with regard to some, I fully believe to be the case; be thankful for it, and improve it well. There was, with respect to many of you, a time when you were in as much distress as any of your brethren; when you were saying with Zion, *My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment passed over from my God.* Adored be his name that it is now otherwise! but remember the wormwood and the gall, to praise God for *the cup of blessing* he has put into your hand; to engage you *to walk humbly before him;* and to do your utmost for the assistance of others. There is a sense in which you *who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak*, and not to be too intent on pleasing yourselves. Take heed of that spiritual epicurism, if I may be allowed the expression, which, while

you are enjoying yourselves and your God, would lead you to forget the distress of others who are mourning after the Lord. Let me conclude all with those excellent words of the apostle, so suitable to both the views in which I would propose them, the direction of the strong and the consolation of the weak; *Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down and strengthen the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet*[2], lest that which is lame should be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. And O that the Lord God, who healeth his Israel, may bless what has now been spoken to that happy purpose! Amen.

[2] Heb. xii. 12, 13.

SERMON XII.

HEAVEN, A CHRISTIAN'S BETTER COUNTRY.

HEBREWS, xi. 16.

But now they desire a better country, that is a heavenly.

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IN this chapter the apostle celebrates the triumphs of faith, particularly exemplified in the behaviour of the Old Testament worthies. Among other instances of it, he mentions Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were called to leave their own country and paternal inheritance, to live in the land of Canaan, which God promised to bestow upon their posterity; but they themselves sojourned in it as in a strange country, and *confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers upon earth. Hereby*, says the apostle, even by such a confession, and such a course of action, *they declared they still sought another country*, and did not look upon themselves as at home, though in the land of promise, while they were in such an unsettled con-

dition. But this country which they sought could not be that whence they came out; for they might have had an opportunity of returning thither, and, therefore, we may certainly conclude, that *they desired a better country, that is a heavenly;* that in what they did, they aimed at the Divine favour, and the happiness of a future state. And as God has now answered their great expectations, the ultimate end of all that they did and suffered in this land of their pilgrimage; *He is not ashamed to be called their God*, in so peculiar and eminent a manner: He has now acted agreeably to so great and important a relation, which he would not have done, if he had never done any more for them than he did whilst they were alive and wandered about in the land of Canaan. You see here, the apostle tells us, that the obedience of the patriarchs proceeded from their desire of heaven; which they looked upon as a better country, better than the land of Chaldea, from whence they came; or the land of Canaan, in which they dwelt. But, as the promises of future happiness which are made in scripture, do plainly extend to all good men, as well as to Abraham, Isaac, and

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Jacob; the character given in the text is common to them; they look upon heaven as their own country, and they desire it as a better country than this lower world. I shall consider the reason which he has to form such a judgment of it, and the practical improvement that we may make of considering the future happiness in this view, as our country, and as our better country.

I. I will consider, in what respects heaven may be said to be the good man's country. It is plainly represented in this view in the text, as the country of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and, therefore, by consequence, it is our country as we are heirs with them of the same promise. For the apostle tells us, that *the blessing of Abraham is come upon the Gentiles*[1]; that is, we have a right to those spiritual blessings which were promised to him and to his posterity; and, therefore, may look upon heaven as our country, as they looked upon it as such. In this regard, good men in scripture speak of their abode in this world, as a pilgrimage state. So Jacob does, *The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years*[2].

[1] Gal. iii. 14.

[2] Gen. xlvii. 9.

And we cannot think, that this only refers to Jacob's unsettled condition, as he dwelt in tents, and frequently removed his habitation from one place to another. We find David speaking of it as common to himself, and all his pious ancestors. *I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.* And he speaks of the whole congregation in general: *We are strangers before thee, and sojourners*, as were all our fathers. And the apostle teaches all Christians to consider this life in this view: *I beseech you as pilgrims and strangers, abstain from fleshly lusts.* And St. Paul; *We have here no continuing city; but we seek one to come.* Seeing it is so plain that heaven is represented in scripture as the good man's country, let us consider, why it may be so called. I shall mention only three particulars.

1. Because he has his birth from thence. In common speech, our country, and the land of our nativity, are used as synonymous terms. It is true, a Christian's body *is from the earth, earthy*, composed of the same common materials with those of the beasts that perish; but, then his rational and immortal soul is of an heavenly original,

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breathed into his nostrils by the breath of God. But it is in a more peculiar and distinguishing manner, that a Christian regeneration, or new birth, is from above. It is the very phrase that is used, *except a man be born again*, or, as it is in the original, be born from above, *he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* And it is said elsewhere, that *those who have received Christ*, as all sincere Christians have, *are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* Thus heaven may be said to be the Christian's country; because he is the son of the King of heaven.

2. The most considerable of his kindred and friends are there. The ever blessed God, who is become his father, is, indeed, essentially present in all places; and *the earth is full of his glory.* But there are more peculiar manifestations of his presence in that brighter and more glorious world. And, therefore, our Lord Jesus Christ speaks of him as *the Father who is in heaven*, and directs us to consider him under this view. Jesus, our dear elder brother, who has entered into that relation by taking part of our human nature, though for awhile he con-

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versed in our lower world, is now ascended to the court of his Father; *he is gone into heaven, and is at the right hand of God*[3]. The angels, who are our faithful guardians, and our tender friends; though they are often dispatched to the world which we inhabit, to be the executioners of his vengeance, or the ministers of his love; yet they have their settled abode there[4], and, therefore are frequently called *the angels who are in heaven*[5]. And, to complete the family, all the children of God who have died out of our world are living there. For when the meanest Christian resigns his soul, *it is carried by angels into Abraham's bosom*[6]: a Jewish phrase to signify heaven. There, perhaps, are our pious parents, to whom we owe our lives and our education; and, perhaps, under God, some of the first principles of a Divine temper. There are our holy teachers and instructors, who directed and led us in the way to heaven, and have spoken to us the word of the Lord. There are many of our acquaintance, with whom we have gone to the house of God in company, and who have warmed, and animated, and encouraged us in our duty; besides *an innumerable company* of other

[3] 1 Pet. iii. 22.

[4] Matt. xxii. 30.

[5] Matt. xxiv. 36.

[6] Luke xvi. 22.

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excellent souls, the children of the same common Father, whose characters we have admired and loved; though, perhaps, we were not acquainted with their persons. Thus, we see, if we are sincere Christians, heaven is the habitation of our kindred and friends; and, upon this account, it may properly be called our country.

3. Heaven may be called the Christian's country, because his inheritance is there. And, indeed, though the former are just, and I hope useful observations, yet I question not that it is principally, if not solely, with regard to this, that it is called our country in scripture; and particularly in the text: *They desired a better country*, that is, a better inheritance than the land of Canaan. God has sent his children into this world, as into a place of education; where, by the exercises of the graces and virtues of the Christian life, they are to be trained up to a fitness for that glory, which he designs them in the next. And, whatever share we may have of temporal enjoyments, we do not look upon them as our portion, but only as the provision which our bountiful Father has made for our present subsistence, and necessary

expenses during our minority; but our estate and inheritance lie in a better world. And scripture has taught us thus to conceive of the matter. *The spirit of promise* is called the *earnest of our inheritance*[7]: the same with the purchased possession in the following clause of the verse; the earnest of heaven. And, elsewhere, we read of being made *meet for the inheritance of the saints in light*[8]. And, more expressly, *we are* said to be *begotten again to a lively hope of an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; reserved in heaven for us*[9]. Having thus considered in what respects heaven may be called our country, I proceed to make one reflection upon this first general. Seeing heaven is our country, let us take care to live like those who belong to such a country. This is what the apostle recommends to us by his own example. *Our conversation*, saith he, *is in heaven*[1]; or we behave ourselves like citizens of heaven. Let us remember, that whilst we are in this world, we sojourn in a strange land, and are at a distance from our home; and, therefore, do not let us be inordinately affected with any thing in it. Let us not be

[7] Eph. i. 14.

[8] Col. i. 12.

[9] 1 Pet. i. 4.

[1] Phil. iii. 20.

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too much transported with the entertainments, nor too much dejected with the disappointments which we meet with in this land of our pilgrimage; but, let us be carrying on a constant, regular design of a happy abode in this glorious country: and let all the actions of our life have a tendency towards it; and to animate us to prosecute our journey with the greatest vigour and cheerfulness, let us be endeavouring to form an acquaintance with it. In the scripture, God has given us a map of this heavenly Canaan. Let us take our notions of it from thence, and make this description of it very familiar to us. Let us keep up a constant correspondence with it, by frequent and earnest addresses to the throne of the King of Heaven, and by meditating and discoursing upon the happiness of it. Let us be zealous for the interests of this heavenly country, and do our utmost to increase the number of the inhabitants of it. Let us endeavour to reflect an honour upon it, by imitating the manners of those who live there, and showing the same zeal for the honour of God, and the same affectionate regard to the good of our fellow-creatures, that they do. Especially, let us maintain a

peculiar affection for our fellow-citizens, and endeavour to help them forward on their journey thither. And, in the last place, let us be ready to leave this world, whenever it shall please God to give us a dismission from it; that so we may go into this country where we shall be no more strangers and foreigners, but *fellow-citizens with* the glorified *saints, and of the* highest *household of God.* I have but hinted at these particulars, that I may not trespass upon your time, and some of them may be considered with greater advantage under the second general head: SERM. XII.

II. To consider in what respects heaven is a better country, and to be preferred to this which he now inhabits. It is so upon six accounts.

1. As it is a more healthful country: a country, where he will be freed from all those distempers both of body and mind: which he is now groaning under. The weaknesses and infirmities of a mortal body are a constant interruption to us in the worship of God, and a clog to the soul in the more vigorous exercises of devotion. But, besides these, we are now liable to a great variety of sicknesses and pains; which, for the time of

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their continuance, do utterly unhinge the mind, and unfit us for the business and enjoyment of life, and especially unfit us for the immediate service of God. The most that a poor Christian can do, when he is labouring under them, is now and then to raise a languishing thought towards God, or utter a broken groan; and, perhaps, the language of it is, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far* from helping me, and *from the voice of my complaint?* We are now continually liable to such disorders as these; and in all probability, the longer we continue in the world, the more shall we be obnoxious to them. But in heaven, the inhabitants shall not say, he is sad. *There shall be no more death,* [2] Rev. xxi. 4. *neither sorrow, nor crying*[2]; there shall be no more pain, but we shall always attend on the most exalted services with immortal vigour and unwearied alacrity, as active, and as incorruptible as flames of fire. But there are other kinds of distempers which give a Christian much greater disturbance than those which we have been now mentioning. I mean, those of a spiritual nature. His soul is infected with original corruption, and though, by the grace of God, it is in some

measure rectified; yet he finds by unhappy experience, that he is sanctified but in part; and there is still *a law in his members, that wars against the* better *law of his mind;* the remainder of a degenerate nature, tempting him to sin, and drawing him aside from duty, by making him cold and remiss in it. But in heaven, all these diseases shall be immediately cured. So we are told, *nothing shall enter* into the new Jerusalem *which defileth*[3]; *but it shall be inhabited by the spirits of just men made perfect*[4]. They shall see God's face in righteousness, and be transformed into his complete likeness[5]. Thus the whole man shall prosper, and be in health; and it is this which makes heaven a better country than earth.

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[3] Rev. xxi. 27.

[4] Heb. xii. 21.

[5] Ps. xvii. 15.

2. Heaven is a better country, because it is a more peaceful country. Peace is certainly one of the most valuable enjoyments of life: it gives grace and sweetness to the meanest accommodations. *Better is a dinner of herbs, where love is, than a stalled ox, and hatred therewith*[6]. But it is the mournful complaint of the Christian, whilst in this world, that his *soul has long dwelt with them who are enemies to peace;* so that his life is frequently compared to a warfare. But in heaven those

[6] Prov. xv. 17.

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hostile alarms shall be over[7], our avowed enemies shall for ever be banished, and the inhabitants shall live in the strictest love and harmony. All our avowed enemies shall be banished to an eternal distance. The devil, and wicked men, the instruments of temptation, shall be confined in the bottomless pit. We shall have done with this tempting world; and its terrors, and its allurements shall not be able to distress us any longer. And, in the last place, all the remainders of the apostacy, that make us the more dangerous enemies to ourselves, shall, by the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, be for ever rooted out; and there shall be an uninterrupted peace within, and a constant approbation of our own behaviour. And further, it is another very considerable branch of the happiness of this peaceful country, that the inhabitants of it shall live in a perfect union and harmony with each other. Good men are now the children of the same Father, the members of the same body, under the operations of the same Spirit, and, in general, formed to the same heavenly and Divine temper; and yet, which is very unaccountable, they are frequently quarreling one with

[7] Isa. lvii. 2.

another. Their worldly interests sometimes clash; and they are too much attached to them: or they differ in their opinions about the circumstantials of religion, and the remainders of pride and passion make them impatient of contradiction, and put them upon laying too great a stress upon trifles. But the air of heaven is calm and serene; and there will be none of these angry tempests to disturb it. All the remainders of ignorance and bigotry, of pride and carnality, that occasion so much uneasiness amongst us now, will then for ever be done away, and to them will succeed the more abundant influences of the Spirit of love, and of a sound mind. Nay, we shall not only cease from uncharitable contentions, and unkind censures of each other, but we shall *love one another* with the utmost sincerity and ardour; and there will be such an entire harmony among the blessed, that the happiness of each will, in a manner, be the happiness of all. *How good and pleasant for brethren thus to live together in unity*[8]*!*

[8] Psalm cxxxiii. 1.

3. The heavenly country will afford us nobler employments than those we are taken up with. Though our bodies are the meaner

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part of our nature, yet, in our present circumstances, the greatest part of our time is spent about them. There are a great many Christians, whom the providence of God has placed in such circumstances, as that most of their days are spent in providing for the necessities of themselves and their families. And we are all of us obliged to spend a great part of our lives in such employments as we would very gladly be excused from. The very trouble of removing this heavy body from one place to another is inconvenient and disagreeable, and takes up abundance of time, which might more pleasantly be employed another way. It is true, we are not entirely excluded from the improvement of our minds, and the service of God; but these are only the work of a few happy moments, and we are quickly to descend from the mount of contemplation or devotion to attend to affairs of an inferior nature. But in heaven the more immediate service of God is represented as our constant employment: *His servants shall serve him*[9]. We shall divide our time betwixt the most intense contemplation, the most rapturous adoration, and the most vigorous active services, succeeding each other in a delightful variety, and all of

[9] Rev. xxii. 3.

them, in a degree, suited to the enlarged capacities of a glorified spirit.

4. The heavenly country will afford us richer entertainments. The greater part of our present entertainments are suited more directly to the animal part of our nature. And as for the more refined pleasures of learning and study, there are but few who have an opportunity, though there may be many who have a genius for them; and, to them, they are seasoned with so much difficulty and perplexity, and such a mortifying discovery of their own ignorance, that *by increasing in knowledge they increase in sorrow.* There are indeed nobler pleasures than these, which God is frequently pleased to impart to the sincere Christian, in a sense of his love, and the hope and expectation of immortal happiness with him; and these are dawnings of heaven, the grapes of the land of promise. But still they are no more than the dawning to the perfect day, or the first fruits to the plentiful harvest. The rich cordial is imparted only in a small quantity, lest it should be too strong for the infirmities of our nature. But in heaven, God will cause us to drink of *the rivers of his pleasure;* and our thirsty souls will be satisfied. Though we shall not

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eat or drink, marry or be given in marriage, yet there are entertainments of a higher nature, which are represented by *eating of the fruit of the tree of life*, and *being led by the Lamb to rivers of living water*. We shall see God, and behold the glory of our Redeemer; and our souls will be transformed into so divine a temper, that those sacred employments, which we mentioned under the former head, will be, to us, the sweetest entertainment; and it will be *our meat and drink to do the will of our Father in heaven*.

5. In the heavenly country we shall have better company than we have upon earth. To a person of a social and friendly temper, his company is one of the principal things which he would regard in the choice of a settlement. But in this world our company is of a mixed nature; we are sometimes obliged, in prudence and decency, to converse with those from whom we can expect but little improvement or entertainment. The greatest part of the world about us have no sense of religion; and to introduce any discourse of such would be the way to make ourselves disagreeable, if not contemptible to them. The noblest creatures, whom we can now converse with, are imperfect Chris-

tians, in whom the Divine life is only begun, and there is a great deal opposite to it. Perhaps we find it a difficult matter to engage these in discourse upon religious subjects, either because they are frequently cold and indifferent, or of a bashful or reserved temper. But if there are a few of us got together, and the discourse takes a serious turn; yet, alas! our sorrows, and our fears, and our complaints make up a very considerable part of it. But in heaven it will be quite otherwise. Do but see what an account the apostle has given us of the inhabitants of that better country: *We are come to an innumerable company of angels, and the general assembly of the first-born, who are written in heaven*, &c. Perhaps it may be too familiar to speak of the blessed God as our companion, and yet it is certain we shall live in his immediate presence. It is probable that the man Christ Jesus may enter into discourse with every particular person. And what an unspeakable satisfaction must it be to us, to be admitted to see, and to converse with, that dearest, kindest Friend! with him whom our souls loved to so high a degree as to prefer him to the whole world, while he was only the object of faith. It must be unspeakably

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delightful to dwell among the angels; to see the beautiful forms in which they may probably appear; and to hear them discourse, with all the charms of celestial eloquence, of the sublimest doctrines, and the most entertaining facts; to hear them telling of the several revolutions in the angelic world, and the kind messages on which they were employed for our sake. And it must be at least equal pleasure, to meet with our Christian friends and relations, who were the greatest joy and comfort to us upon earth; and whose absence has cost us so many sighs and tears; to look back, with them, upon the labours of the way, and to observe dangers escaped; and to see how all the steps of the Divine Providence, which we thought most directly against us, had a subserviency to promote the happiness that we enjoy; and then to be introduced by them into the presence of the patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, and all the excellent saints of the Old and New Testament dispensation, whose names we have so often pronounced with reverence and admiration; and to be received by those great and illustrious persons, as brethren and fellow-citizens; and to be treated with the utmost condescension and complacence, and

the warmest assurances of an eternal friendship! How gladly would we quit the dearest of our friends, but to be immediately admitted to such a society.

6. Heaven is a better country in regard of its continuance. The little portion of this earth which any of us may possess will quickly be transmitted into other hands; for when we go away, *we can carry nothing with us.* And it is but a short time, and the earth itself shall be burnt up, and *the elements shall melt with fervent heat.* But heaven is a kingdom *that cannot be removed*[1]. St. Peter speaks of it as *an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*[2]; and St. Paul, as *an eternal inheritance*[3]; and *a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God*[4]; and *a better and a more enduring substance*[5] than what can be lost for the sake of religion; and once more, as *a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*[6]. And now, when eternity is added to all those particulars which we mentioned under the former heads, it is certain that there will need no further consideration to prove that heaven is a Christian's better country. I conclude with some practical reflections.

[1] Heb. xii. 28.
[2] 1 Pet. i. 4.
[3] Heb. ix. 15.
[4] Heb. xi. 10.
[5] Heb. x. 34.
[6] 2 Cor. v. 1.

1. If the heavenly country be so much

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better than this which we inhabit, then what reason have we to bless God, who has provided such an inheritance for us. As we are *by nature children of wrath*, we are heirs to the regions of darkness and despair; and it is a most amazing thing that God should allow us such a nobler world for our habitation than this in which we now dwell; that he should support the harmony of nature for our sakes, and *cause his sun to shine, and his rain to descend upon us*, that the face of our creation might be beautiful and glorious; whereas it might justly be abandoned by him, and suffered to sink into confusion, and bury its inhabitants under its ruins: And yet this is the least that he does for us; he designs this only for the state of our pilgrimage, and has begotten us again to a lively hope.

After death we shall be admitted into a better country, that is, a heavenly. It is his love that has prepared it for us, and his bounty that bestows it upon us; and it is by the influence of his grace alone that we can be made fit to be partakers of the inheritance with the saints in light. As the work is so entirely his own, let us give him the praise of it; always remembering that it is the purchase of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ,

who was made perfect through sufferings, that he might bring us to such a glory.

2. Is the heavenly country so much better than this? Then what a foolish thing is it to neglect it for the sake of this present world. Sinners do this in the most notorious degree; and would to God that sincere Christians were not in some respects chargeable with it! The sinner has chosen his portion here; and if he can secure a considerable portion upon earth, he blesses his own soul, and thinks that he is a wise and a happy man. And I am afraid this is the case with some of you. Perhaps you have attended this discourse with a great deal of coldness and indifference; and yet if I could but have directed you how you might have secured a plentiful estate, I dare engage you would have heard me with the liveliest attention and the most careful observation. But though I have been proving to you that heaven is a much better country, and consequently is more worthy of your study and your pursuit; yet, like those foolish creatures in Psalm cvi. 24, you *despise this pleasant land.* It is really an argument of a very stupid and sordid temper that you can hear of such a glorious country as this, and yet have no desire of

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securing an inheritance in it; but prefer your worldly possessions before it; and you can never expect that it should end well. The Israelites despised the land of Canaan, which, though it was *a land flowing with milk and honey*, yet it was only a type of the heavenly country which we have been describing; observe how God resented it. *He swore in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest*[7]. And the apostle teaches you to apply this to your own case. *Let us fear*, says he, *lest a promise being left us of entering into rest, we should come short of it through unbelief*[8]. The time may come when, like Esau, you would be glad to inherit the blessing, but *will find no place for repentance* in God, *though you seek it carefully with tears.* And if this ever comes to be your condition, then the more you have heard of the glory and happiness of it, the more you will curse your own folly that you would not accept of it when it was offered upon such easy terms; but gave the preference to those worthless trifles, that could at best only amuse you, and have now for ever forsaken you. There are others who, though they have some regard to this better country, and have indeed chosen their inheritance in it; yet are so taken up

[7] Psa. xcv. 11.

[8] Heb. iv. 1.

with the affairs of this world that, if one was to observe the general course of their behaviour, one would think they were citizens of it. They *rise up early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness*, and drink the water of sorrow. And for what do they give themselves all this trouble and fatigue? Not that they may obtain a larger possession in heaven, but only that they may improve their estates, and lay up a little more money for themselves and their families; that they may get a little more of what they know they must quickly leave, and of what they would not have for their portion for a thousand worlds. For shame, Christians! do not indulge yourselves in such a temper as this. Consider what mean pursuits you are engaged in, how unworthy the character of a child of God and of an heir of heaven! Consider what a slight you put upon your better country, and how ungratefully you requite that God who has given you some hopes of an interest in it. Consider how absolutely Christ has commanded you *not to labour for the food that perishes, but for that which endures to eternal life;* and to *lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven.* How do you answer it to your own consciences, that you neglect the cautions of

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such a master; and, indeed, the very design of Christianity? which was to raise the soul above these enjoyments of time and sense, and to fix the thoughts on an unseen happiness. And, in the last place, consider how much more effectually you would secure the happiness of your lives by making it your business to maintain a constant regard to heaven, than you do by your present course; and particularly, what a comfortable evidence this would be of your sincerity, which now you are frequently doubting about. And by the united force of these important considerations, be persuaded, with greater ardour and application, to desire and to seek after this heavenly country, the land of your nativity, the land of your kindred, and the land of your inheritance.

3. If heaven be our better country, then how willing should we be to die, that we may go thither[9]! When one has been meditating upon such a description of it as has now been set before our eyes, though in a very cold and an imperfect manner, one would think it should be the most difficult part of a Christian's work to persuade himself patiently to wait till God shall give him his passport to go out of this country, and to enter upon

[9] 2Cor.v.2.

that. And yet there are a great many good people who are afraid of death; of death, which shall consign them to eternal glory. They are come to the borders of Canaan, and see the pleasant fields of that goodly country, and yet, because there is a Jordan between, and the passage may be cold and difficult, they are desiring to turn back into the wilderness, though they have met with hunger and drought, with serpents and Amalekites. And perhaps this is the case with some of us. It should therefore be our concern to rectify so unbecoming a temper. To this purpose let us endeavour to fix ourselves in the steadfast belief of the reality of this unseen country; that it is not a Utopian region, the creature of fancy, or the contrivance of policy; but that God himself has prepared and recommended it. And let us endeavour to affect our minds with frequent meditations and affectionate discourses of the glories and happiness of it; that we may be persuaded that these temporal enjoyments, which we so fondly embrace and so unwillingly part with, are by no means worthy to be compared with it. And especially let it be our care to clear up our own title to it. For, after all, here is the great difficulty. We know that dying is

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a matter of infinite importance; and it will fix us in an unalterable eternity. And though we could gladly be willing *to be dissolved*, if we were sure we should *be with Christ*, yet when we come to die, we shrink back from it. There is some uncertainty in the matter, and we hardly dare venture on a bare probability; because we think ourselves not sufficiently prepared for so awful a work, and are desirous of putting our souls into a more hopeful and comfortable posture. It should, therefore, be our great care to behave ourselves so that we may have the testimony of our consciences to support us, and an assured sense of our union with Christ, through *a faith that works by love*. And this will give us courage and confidence when the creatures are sinking under us; when death is crumbling our earthly tabernacle into the dust from whence it was raised, it will fill our souls with a song of triumph, as knowing that *the days of our pilgrimage* are at length accomplished, and we are going *to a city that has foundations, and whose builder and maker is God.*

END OF VOL. I.

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