

comes from God, and carries the soul to God again. 'The new man is created in righteousness and true holiness, after the image of God,' Eph. iv. 24, and hath a tendency in it to draw us to God again.

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SERMON LXXXIX.

*My soul fainteth for thy salvation ; but I hope in thy word.*—  
VER. 81.

THIS verse is wholly narrative, and consists of two branches:—

1. The first clause showeth how he stood affected to God's salvation, *my soul fainteth for thy salvation.*

2. His support till that affection was satisfied, *but I hope in thy word.*

Before we can make any further progress in explaining and applying this scripture, we must first see what is this salvation which is here spoken of. Salvation in scripture hath divers acceptations ; it is put—

1. For that temporal deliverance which God giveth, or hath promised to give, to his people. So it is taken Exod. xiv. 13, 'Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord that he will show you to-day ;' that is, the wonderful deliverance which he will work for you. So Lam. iii. 26, 'It is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord ;' meaning by salvation, their recovery out of captivity. It was their duty to wait for this deliverance ; and though it were long first, yet, having a promise, they were to keep up their hope.

2. For the exhibition of Christ in the flesh : Ps. xcvi. 2, 3, 'The Lord hath made known his salvation : his righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered his mercy and truth to the house of Israel : all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.' Clearly that psalm containeth a prediction of the setting up of Christ's kingdom, and a bringing of the Gentile world into subjection to it ; which was first to be offered to the people of the Jews, and from thence to be carried on throughout all the regions of the world. So old Simeon expresseth himself, Luke ii. 29, 30, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word : for mine eyes have seen thy salvation ;' meaning thereby Christ actually exhibited or born in the flesh, which was the beginning of the kingdom of the Messiah.

3. For the benefits which we have by Christ on this side heaven ; as the pardon of sin, and the renovation of our natures ; these are called salvation, as Mat. i. 21, 'He shall save his people from their sins ;' and Titus iii. 5, 'He hath saved us by washing in the laver of regeneration ;' and in the Old Testament, Ps. li. 12, 'Restore unto us the joy of thy salvation ;' that is, the joy which we have because God hath freed us from our sins.

4. For everlasting life : Heb. v. 9, 'He is become the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him ;' and 1 Peter i. 9, 'Re-

ceiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls ;' meaning thereby our final reward.

The text is applicable to all these. But (1.) Most simply we must expound it of salvation in the first sense, because the drift of the man of God in this octonary is to show how he was affected ; since God heard him not at the first cry, or as soon as he prayed for deliverance : though he prayed for deliverance, yet the help promised and hoped for was delayed so long, till he was ready to faint, and had fainted altogether, but that the promise revived and kept up his hopes. (2.) If these words be supposed to be spoken by the church, and in her name, they fitly represent the longings of the Old Testament fathers after Christ's coming in the flesh. For as David expresseth himself here, so doth old Jacob : Gen. xlix. 18, ' I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.' That speech cometh in there by way of interruption, for as he was blessing his children, he turneth to the Lord, desiring his salvation by Christ, of which Samson, belonging to the tribe of Dan (the tribe which he was then blessing), was a special type. So it is said of Abraham, John viii. 56, ' Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day ; and he saw it, and was glad.' Abraham knowing him to be the true Messiah, did earnestly desire to see that day, and to his great contentment got a sight of it by faith ; it was a sweet and blessed sight to him. So Luke x. 24, ' Many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them ;' that is, David, a king, and other prophets longed for this day. So Heb. xi. 13, ' Having seen the promises afar off, they were persuaded of them, and embraced them.' Oh ! they hugged the promises, saying, These will one day yield a saviour to the world. So it is said of all the serious believers of the Old Testament, Luke ii. 25, that ' they waited for the consolation of Israel ;' that is, for the redemption of the world by the blood of Christ, and the pouring out of the Holy Ghost, upon which followed the calling of the Gentiles and the setting up of the kingdom of God in the world. These things the saints longed for, waited for ; and because the Lord suspended the exhibition of them till the fulness of time, and did not presently satisfy their desires, they might be said to faint ; but the promise kept up their faith in waiting and confidence. I cannot wholly exclude this sense, because the salvation promised at the coming of the Messiah was the greatest, and common to all the faithful. They had many discouragements in expecting it from the wickedness and calamities of that people from whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ was to descend. But though they were ready to faint, they did not give over the hope of that salvation, having God's word for it, and the remembrance of it kept afoot by the sacrifices and types of the law. (3.) Since Christ hath appeared in the flesh, and hath wrought salvation for us, we must wait, and long, and look for that part of salvation which is yet to be performed ; as the deliverance of the church from divers troubles, the freedom of particular believers from their doubts and fears, and finally our eternal salvation, which shall be completed at Christ's second coming. All that have the first-fruits of the Spirit are groaning for this and hoping for this, Rom. viii. 23-25. We are to desire heaven, yet patiently to

stay God's time, for here is fainting and hoping, or, as the apostle saith, hastening to and yet waiting for the coming of the Lord, 2 Peter iii. 12. One is the effect of desire, the other of hope; desire hastening, and hope waiting.

These things being cleared, let us first apply the words to temporal deliverance. Observe—

*Doct.* 1. The afflictions of God's people may be long and grievous before any comfort and deliverance cometh. For the affliction continued so long upon David that his soul even fainted.

There are three agents in the afflictions of the saints—(1.) God; (2.) Satan; (3.) Wicked men.

1. God hath many wise reasons why he doth not give audience, or a gracious answer at the first call.

[1.] Because he will try our faith, to see if we can depend upon him when it cometh to an extremity. Thus by silence and rebukes Christ tried the woman of Canaan, that her faith might appear the more gloriously: Mat. xv. 28, 'Then Jesus answered, and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith.' And by extremities he still trieth his children: our graces are never exercised to the life, till we are near the point of death; that is faith which can then depend upon God: Job xiii. 15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;' and Ps. xxiii. 4, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.' Many of his children are reduced to great straits; there may be no meal in the barrel nor oil in the cruse before God helpeth them. There may be many mouths to eat little food: John vi. 5, 6, when there was a great deal of company, and little provision, Christ asketh one of his disciples, 'Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? and this he said to prove him, for he himself knew what he would do.' So many a poor believer is put to it. Children increase, trading groweth dead, supplies fail, what shall they do? They pray, and God giveth no answer. This he doth to prove them. It is a strong faith which can hold out in such straits and difficulties.

[2.] To awaken our importunity: Luke xviii. 1, 'And he spake a parable to them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint:' compared with Luke xi. 8, with the parable ensuing. So again an instance in the woman of Canaan, she turneth discouragements into arguments. When Christ said, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs,' she said, 'Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table,' Mat. xv. 26, 27. So the blind men, Mat. xx. 31, the more they were rebuked, cried the more. Rather than his people shall neglect prayer, or grow formal in it, God will cast them into great afflictions; as Christ suffereth the storm to continue till the ship was almost overwhelmed, that his disciples might awaken him, Mat. viii. 25.

[3.] To make us sensible of our weakness; as Paul, 2 Cor. i. 9, 'But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead. We are much given to self-confidence, therefore God will break it, and ere he hath done with us, make us trust in him alone. There is a twofold strength—natural and spiritual.

(1.) Natural ; which ariseth from that courage that is in man as he is a reasonable creature. This will hold out till all probabilities be spent: Prov. xviii. 14, 'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?' Till a man be struck at the heart, his reason will support him.

(2.) Spiritual ; faith, hope, patience. These may be spent when the affliction is deep and pressing, and God's help is long delayed. Faith is the strength of the soul ; as faith decayeth or is tired, the soul faints. Faith may be damped, and give up our case for gone, Ps. cxvi. 11 ; Ps. xxxi. 22, they throw up all, and think it is in vain to wait any longer. Thus will God discover our weakness to ourselves ; the weakness of our reason, the weakness of our faith. I remember Solomon saith, Prov. xxiv. 10, 'If thou faintest in adversity, thy strength is small.' Grievous or long afflictions discover our strength or weakness. Some are of a poor spirit, give up at first assault, before their strength faileth them ; before the probabilities which sense and reason offereth are spent. They are lazy, and love their ease. Some are negligent, do not make use of the helps of faith ; but when evils continue long and sit close, the strongest faith is seen to be too weak ; God by this will humble us.

[4.] God doth this for his own glory, and that his work may be the more remarkable and conspicuous : John xi. 6, 7, 'Jesus loved Lazarus, and when he heard that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.' Little love in that, you will say ; a man would hasten to his dying friend. Christ may dearly love his own, and yet delay to help them even in their extremity, till the fit time come wherein the mercy may be the more conspicuous. It is said, Eccles. iii. 11, 'God hath made everything beautiful in his time.' Before its time, God's work seemeth harsh and rough ; as a statue when it is first hewn out, but in its time it is a curious piece of workmanship. God in his own time and way knoweth best how to comfort his people.

2. It is the devil's design to tire and weary out the people of God, and therefore stirreth up all his malice against us : Luke xxii. 31, 32, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat : but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.' The devil, if he might have the shaking of us, and liberty to do his worst, he would drive us from the faith of Christ, and all hopes by him.

3. Men are unreasonable in their oppositions, and will not relent nor abate anything of their rigour : Zech. i. 15, 'I was a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.' They are still adding to the church's trouble, and would destroy those whom God would only correct and purge, as the slave layeth on unmercifully. Till God restrain it, their wrath never ceaseth. Well, then—

*Use 1.* Let it not seem strange to us that godly men, in their afflictions, though they fly to God and implore his mercy, are not presently delivered, nor always at the first instance. God hath many discoveries to make, much work to do. Would you have faith rewarded before it be tried ? or the beautiful frame and link of causes disturbed for your sakes ? Faith is not tried to purpose till the thing we believe is not

seen, nor have any probability that ever we shall see it; yea, till we see nothing but the contrary, and hope against hope; we must stay till the mercy be ready for us, and we ready for it; a hungry stomach would have the meat ere it be roasted; our times are always present with us, when God's time is not come.

*Use 2.* Let us prepare for grievous and tedious sufferings. We would turn over our hard lesson before we have sufficiently learned it; we love the ease of the flesh, would have no cross, or a very short one. Things will not be so soon or so suddenly effected as we imagine. We make greater provision for a long voyage. We should be strengthened to long-suffering, Col. i. 11, as for all sort of crosses, so for long and tedious crosses.

*Use 3.* If your affliction be long, observe your carriage under it. Doth faith and hope keep you alive still? Heb. vi. 12, 'Be not slothful, but followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises.' Do you keep up your prayerful affections? Rom. xii. 12, 'Continue instant in prayer.' We pray as men out of heart, for fashion's sake, and with little life, rather satisfying our consciences than expressing our hope and confidence. A damp on the spirit of prayer is an ill presage. Can you love God though you be not feasted with self-comforts and present benefits? Isa. xxvi. 8, 'Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee,' &c. Our affections are bribed when desired comforts are presently obtained; God will see if we purely love him.

*Use 4.* For a close to this point. Our sufferings are like to be long; I speak not as determining, but to awaken a spirit of prayer that they may be shortened. When Christ made as if he would go further, they constrained him to tarry, Luke xxiv. 28, 29. These are sad symptoms of it.

1. When reformation is rejected, and corruptions are settling again upon their own base: Hosea vii. 1, 'When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered,' &c.; Ezek. xxiv. 13, 'In thy filthiness is lewdness: because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee.' This crime is not only chargeable on them who opposed the Reformation, but on those who, by multiplied scandals, dishonoured the cause of God. Instance in the Papists in Queen Mary's time, who got in by fraud and violence, not by miscarriage of the Protestants. Then it was sharp and short, ours is like to be tedious and long.

2. When our deliverance is likely to prove a mischief and a misery, when we are not prepared to receive it. God will not give us things for our hurt. And we may fear as much from our brethren, our mutual bickerings, as from enemies; when God promises restoration he promiseth unity: Zeph. iii. 9, 'For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent;' Zech. xiv. 9, 'And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one.' The dog is let loose when the sheep scatter.

3. When there is a damp upon the spirit of prayer, and men give over seeking to God for deliverance as a hopeless thing. God is near when the spirit of prayer is revived: Ezek. xxxvi. 37, 'Thus saith the

Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them: I will increase them with men like a flock;' and Jer. xxix. 12, 13, 'Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you: and ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart;' Dan. ix. 19, 20; and Ps. x. 17, 'Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.' *Et passim alibi.*

4. When God is upon his judicial process, and there is not any course taken to reconcile ourselves to him. God hath been judging his people, judging the nation wherein they live. Judgment began at the house of God. What notable humiliation and reformation hath it produced there? There is God's whole work to be done upon Mount Zion, Isa. x. 12. What fruit of all those terrible judgments? Incurribleness showeth our stripes will be many, our judgments long.

5. When dispensations tend to the removing of the candlestick, or look very like it: Rev. ii. 5, 'Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.' That is done either by destroying judgments, taking away the subject-matter of the church, or by their own apostasy and spiritual fornication, or sad errors and confusions; ill treatment of God's people, opposing his interests by his enemies, and the sinful miscarriages and apostasies of professing friends, will help to wear out an unthankful, murmuring generation.

*Doct. 2.* When salvation is delayed, or deliverance long a-coming, the soul fainteth.

I shall show—(1.) The nature of this fainting; (2.) The causes of fainting; (3.) The kinds of fainting; (4.) The considerations which may preserve us from fainting.

1. For the nature of this fainting. Here we must inquire what is meant by the fainting of the soul. Fainting is proper to the body, but here it is ascribed to the soul, as also in many other places. The apostle saith, Heb. xii. 3, 'Lest ye be weary, and faint in your minds;' where two words are used, weariness and fainting, both taken from the body. Weariness is a lesser, fainting a higher degree of deficiency. In weariness, the body requireth some rest or refreshment, when the active power is weakened, and the vital spirits and principles of motion are dulled; but in fainting, the vital power is contracted, and retireth, and leaveth the outward parts lifeless and senseless. When a man is wearied, his strength is abated; when he fainteth, he is quite spent. These things, by a metaphor, are applied to the soul or mind. A man is weary when the fortitude of his mind, his moral or spiritual strength, is broken or begins to abate, when his soul sits uneasy under sufferings; but when he sinketh under the burden of grievous, tedious, or long affliction, then he is said to faint; when all the reasons and grounds of his comfort are quite spent, and he can hold out no longer.

2. The causes of fainting. The fainting of the body may arise either from labour, sickness and travel, or else from hunger and thirst. So the fainting of the soul is either, first, from the tediousness of present pressures; or, secondly, from a fervent and strong desire.

[1.] From the tediousness of present sorrows and pressures; as Jer. viii. 18, 'When I would comfort myself against my sorrow, my heart fainteth within me.' And why? Because of the length of their afflictions, ver. 20, 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.' Sorrow doth so invade their spirits, that they are by no means able to ease themselves: expectations of this side, and that side, are cut off; they long look for help and relief, but none appeareth. So Lam. i. 22, 'My sighs are many, and my heart is faint.' They are overwhelmed with grief, and cannot bear up with any courage.

[2.] It may be caused by a fervent and strong desire: Ps. lxxxiv. 2, 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of God.' Vehement desires cause a languor. So it is taken here: It is long, O Lord, that I have waited and attended with great desire for deliverance from thee. Those who vehemently desire anything are apt to faint. Where love is hot, desire cannot be cold. The benefit of the church, liberty to serve God, do strongly move the saints; yea, the Spirit of God increaseth the vehemency of these motions; 'For he maketh intercession for the saints with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered,' Rom. viii. 20. He concurreth to the vehemency of the desire; but the fainting is from ourselves, from our weakness. The soul is so earnestly fixed in the expectation of God's salvation that it can no longer keep any equal tenour; so that this fainting is one of the love-errors of the children of God, like a disease which is incident only to the best tempers.

3. The kinds of fainting. (1.) There is a fainting which causeth great trouble and dejection of spirit. (2.) There is a fainting which causeth apostasy and defection from God and the cause of religion.

[1.] There is a fainting which causeth dejection and trouble; this is spoken of Heb. xii. 5, 'My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, neither faint when thou art rebuked of him.' There are the two extremes, slighting and fainting. Now this is a fault in the children of God, to be much perplexed in their troubles; but yet this may be incident to them, religion heightening their sense of evils, and their vehement desires of the comforts of God's presence increasing their trouble.

[2.] There is a fainting which causeth defection and falling off from God, out of cowardice and carnal fear, and casting off the profession of Christianity when they find it troublesome; they grow weary, incline to apostacy: this is not incident to the children of God: Rev. ii. 3, 'Thou hast borne, and hast patience, and hast laboured, and hast not fainted,' not given over the cause of God. There is a fainting which is a slacking or remitting somewhat in our spiritual course, when men begin a little to relent, and to give way to coldness and lukewarmness, and do not keep up their former zeal and fervency or diligence in heavenly things. This may befall sometimes the servants of God, abate somewhat of their former forwardness, Eph. iii. 13, when either they suffer themselves, or those who are primarily instrumental in the work of the gospel are cast into a suffering condition. And there is a fainting which makes totally and finally to abandon the ways of God: Gal. vi. 9, 'He shall reap in due time, if he faint not.' There it is not taken for some remissness, which may befall the best of God's servants, but a total defection.

4. The considerations which may preserve us from fainting.

[1.] It argueth that you are lazy, love the ease of the flesh, have small strength, if you faint upon every appearance of difficulty and trouble: Prov. xxiv. 10, 'If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.' Sinners are not discouraged with every inconvenience occasioned by their sin, but can deny themselves for their lusts' sake; and shall we be soon discouraged in God's service?

[2.] Others that have borne far heavier burthens, do not sink under them. The Lord Christ: Heb. xii. 3, 'For consider him, who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied, and faint in your minds.' Nay, many of his precious servants: Heb. xii. 4, 'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.' If against sin, are we only to praise their courage, never show our own? or do we think to go to heaven without conflicts, when it doth cost them so dear?

[3.] We have given counsel to others: Job iv. 5, 'But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled.' It is an easier matter to instruct others than to carry it well ourselves. The well will give counsel to the sick, and those that stand on land direct those that are apt to sink in deep waters. But should not we remember these things ourselves?

[4.] God promises to moderate the afflictions of his people, and to sweeten the bitterness of them, to take off the oppressing weight of their troubles, lest their souls faint: Isa. lvii. 16, 'For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.' The consideration of man's infirmity and weakness, unable to hold out, causeth the Lord to stay his hand; he will not utterly dishearten and discourage his people that wait for him. A good man will not overburden his beast.

[5.] When reason is tired, faith should supply its place, and we should hope against hope, Rom. iv. 18; for faith can fetch one contrary out of another, and get water out of the rock, as well as out of the fountain. When probable means miscarry, then it is a time for God to work; and faith should bear us out when sense and reason cannot.

[6.] Give vent to the ardour of your desires in prayer: Luke xviii. 1, 'He spake a parable to them, to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;' and Jonah ii. 7, 'When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.' Keep up the suit, it will come to a hearing one day; though it be long ere God ariseth to the judgment, yet then make sure work of it.

[7.] By waiting upon God we learn to wait more: Isa. xl. 31, '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.' Eternal blessings eyed and prepared for will support a fainting soul in the worst evil: 2 Cor. iv. 16, 'For this cause we faint not; though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.' The greatest troubles cannot make void our hope, if our spiritual state increase and our eternal hopes thrive.

*Doct. 3.* Though the soul be in a fainting condition, yet it will accept of nothing but God's salvation, 'Thy salvation:' Ps. xciv. 18,

‘When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up;’ and ver. 19, ‘In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.’ Men may seek to get out of their troubles from wicked men two ways—either by carnal compliance, or by the use of indirect means.

[1.] By carnal compliance, when men violate and prostitute their consciences for their peace’s sake. It is said of some, Heb. xi. 35, that ‘They accepted not deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.’ They might upon certain conditions have been freed from those cruel pains and tortures, but those conditions were contrary to the law of God. We have God’s deliverance upon better terms than man’s, and it is better in itself.

[2.] By using indirect means to get off the trouble; this is making too much haste: Isa. xxviii. 16, ‘He that believeth shall not make haste.’ Ravishing the blessing, rather than waiting for the issues of God’s providence. Those that do so, God will reckon them with the workers of iniquity: Ps. cxxv. 5, ‘As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.’ They that shift for themselves lose the benefit of God’s protection. These are dealt with as open enemies. Now the reasons of the point are these:—

1. Because they are satisfied in God’s providential government. God never puts power in the hands of wicked men but for his own holy ends. Therefore, while God continueth them, they are observing what God will do by them: 2 Sam. xvi. 11, ‘Let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him.’ God hath work for them to do, to mortify our wantonness, to break our stubborn humours.

2. Because God’s salvation will come in the best time and in the best way: Ps. lxii. 1, ‘Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation;’ Isa. xxx. 18, ‘God is a God of judgment: blessed are they that wait for him.’ God doth all things with wisdom, and in the best manner.

*Use.* How afflicted soever we be, let us not seek to be delivered in a way not allowed by God, nor take any sinister courses, nor use any base shifts to rid ourselves out of danger. This is to distrust God, and to entangle ourselves the more, and to miscarry in a long voyage, after we are about to enter into the port. See the story of Saul’s sacrificing, in 1 Sam. xiii., from the 8th verse to the 15th. If he had tarried a little longer all had been well. Before the day was quite over, Saul would sacrifice, and then Samuel cometh and telleth him God had rent the kingdom from him for his distrust and disobedience. So many will forestall the blessing.

*Doct.* 4. Hope keepeth us alive in the midst of faintings: ‘My soul fainteth; but I hope.’

1. Observe here, that though the faith of God’s children seems to faint, yet it doth not die nor wholly fail. Some seem greedily to catch at promises at first, but their ardour is soon spent; and when it is a troublesome business to wait upon God, they give it over. This is the faith and hope of temporaries, but the good ground ‘bringeth forth fruit with patience,’ Luke viii. 15. God’s children tarry his leisure; and though now and then they are ready to faint, yet they

recover. Their faith, hope, and patience seemeth to be almost spent, yet it is not utterly put out; as David here was not broken with long and tedious difficulties; though he saw no end of his miseries, yet he would still depend upon God. There is an abiding seed, 1 John iii. 8. Their state is secured by God's covenant, that there shall be no total rupture nor utter deficiency. Perseverance is a condition of the new covenant, not only required, but given, as all conditions of the new covenant are. There is *donum perseverantiae*, not only a power to persevere, but perseverance itself.

2. That which keepeth our faith from dying, and sustaineth the soul of the faithful, and keepeth life in them, is the resuscitation of our hopes. What doth hope to the supporting of a fainting soul?

[1.] It draweth off the mind from things present to things future; and diversion is one way to cure trouble. While we pore only on our grievous troubles, they prove a temptation to us; but hope lifts up the head, and looketh above these things. That poring on the affliction and trouble causes fainting; see Lam. iii. 18–20; but remembering God's mercies and promises reviveth us. The remembering the great depth of affliction and extremity overwhelmeth us: I have them in mind continually, and so am dejected; but when I begin to call to mind God's infinite mercies, I conceive some hope of recovery. That which was remembered is in ver. 22–26.

[2.] Hope representeth the excellency and certainty of these future things, and so causeth earnestness and patience.

(1.) The excellency. It is a question among divines what is the difference between faith and hope, because they are much of a like nature. One difference is, faith looks to the truth of the promise, hope to the goodness of the thing promised; for faith respects the person giving his fidelity, and hope the person receiving the benefit, and exciteth them to look for it. It is something worth the looking and waiting for, and such as will recompense present troubles, 2 Cor. v. 17, 18.

(2.) The certainty; for though it mainly comforts itself with the goodness of the thing promised, yet it causeth patience in waiting, because of the sureness. It seeth things that cannot be seen and perceived by sense: Rom. viii. 25, 'If we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.' It is good, and it will not fail; therefore we may and must tarry God's leisure.

(3.) The most noble and principal object of hope is the great promise of eternal salvation. This must in chief be hoped for; partly because temporal salvation is not so surely promised, but under sundry cautions and reservations; as if it be for our good, if God's glory will permit it, and the beauty of his work, and the many things God hath to do before the deliverance be brought about; especially if it be a common salvation, wherein others are concerned as well as we; as if their hearts be prepared, &c. Partly because Christians are to be at a point of greater indifferency about outward things than the believers of the Old Testament, now life and immortality is brought to light, 2 Tim. i. 10. They were trained up by sensible things both in their worship and promises. The cross is one of our conditions: Mat. xvi. 24, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and

take up his cross, and follow me.' We must look for afflictions, and those not ordinary afflictions, but the loss of all, or else we do not count the charges aright; we must refer all to God's will. Christ may let some slip through at a cheaper and easier rate, but all must resolve on it. Partly because this is propounded as the great comfort, Luke xii. 32, 'Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom;' and accordingly used by the saints. David in his disappointments: Ps. xxxix. 7, 'And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.' He meaneth the hope of immortality, opposite to that vain show and false appearance which is in worldly things. This was that Job comforted himself with, that ancient believer: Job xix. 26, 'Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God;' and the Maccabees, Heb. xi. 35, 'They were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.' Partly because that which God hath promised in the world to come is only satisfactory, and able to quiet a man's mind, and make him patiently wait upon God in all his troubles. Here is enough to countervail all difficulties, to support us under them, to recompense us for them; it is not long ere it will come to hand, it cannot enough be desired; it may be hoped for by the righteous in their greatest extremities: Prov. xiv. 32, 'The righteous hath hope in his death.'

*Use.* For instruction. When your souls are apt to faint, let hope look out for better times or better things.

1. For better times. God will not always chide: Ps. ciii. 9, 'He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever.' Nor shall the rod of the wicked always rest on the back of the righteous, Ps. cxxv. 3. Therefore rouse up yourselves, and say, as David, Ps. xlii. 5, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him,' &c. Let us not always pore on our grievous miseries. Observe the season, when apt to be corrupted with ease and prosperity, and to carry it negligently to God, and proudly and oppressingly to men. There may come a change. So when apt to faint, seek out arguments of encouragement, and hope that God will be good to us: Ps. lvi. 3, 'At what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.' That is our business at such a time, to strengthen our dependence, for still we must oppose the prevailing corruption.

2. Better things. That is the true Christian spirit that mainly looks after the world to come; that hope is freest from snares. An earthly hope maketh men carnal, often enticeth them to use ill means to get it accomplished. Desires and hopes of temporal happiness, that the world may smile upon us, doth not breed so good a spirit. This hope goeth upon surer grounds, meeteth with fewer disappointments.

Well, then, hope for these things. We shall hear of few in whom the former part of the text is verified, if understood of eternal salvation, 'My soul fainteth for thy salvation.' This temper is very rare, and few have such a spirit as Paul had: Phil. i. 23, 'I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ,' &c. But all Christians should hope for eternal life, and prepare for it, and make this the great cordial and solace of their souls. God's people do too much please themselves

with thoughts of temporal happiness ; this is no good spirit. The appetite of temporal honour, wealth and peace, is natural to us ; we should be at a greater indifferency about these things, so as not to be very solicitous about them.

*Doct. 5.* This hope is bred or nourished in us by the word of God.

1. Because that is the law of commerce between us and God. In the promissory part it showeth what salvation and deliverance we may expect from him ; and in the mandatory part, upon what terms, and who are the persons qualified to receive this deliverance : and without heeding of these things, hope is a groundless presumption, as if we expect things not promised, or not in the way wherein they are promised. We must have an eye both on the promises and the precepts—the one to encourage us, the other to direct us. It showeth our hope is of the right constitution ; Ps. cxix. 166, ‘ I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments ; ’ Ps. cxlvii. 11, ‘ The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy ; ’ and Ps. xxxiii. 18, ‘ Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy ; ’ as a man that consulteth with his charter and conveyance is more assured of his right and title. The scripture is cast into the nature of a covenant or mutual indenture drawn up between us and God. There we find God hath deeply and strongly engaged himself to us, and we to him. This we have to show under his hand.

2. We should give such credit to the word of God as to believe it, when to sense there is no likelihood of the performance of it ; for what is impossible to appearance, is not impossible to God, and the certainty of the promises doth not depend upon the probabilities of sense, but upon the all-sufficiency of God. *Firmia<sup>1</sup> dicta tanti existimantur, quentus est ipse qui diceret.* If God promise anything, who is almighty and who is faithful, it will be accomplished, and we may rest upon it in the greatest extremities, perplexities, and seeming impossibilities. We must not confine God within the bounds of created power.

3. God’s word should be as good as deed, for his word and the beck of his will doth all things : ‘ Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly ? ’ Micah ii. 7. Not say good, but do good ; when it is said, it may be accounted done, the performance is so certain.

4. The best holdfast we can have upon God is by his word. Whatever his dispensations be, though he withhold comfort and deliverance from us, yet it will do well in time. Therefore, whether he smileth or frowneth, his word should be our support. His dispensations vary, but his word is firm.

*Use.* Let the promises of God strengthen and revive our hearts.

If God hath said anything, his people should believe him. His word is a word of truth, Heb. xi. 11. Sarah’s faith was built upon this ; ‘ She judged him faithful who had promised.’ His word is a word of power, for he is a God of all power and might : Heb. xi. 17–19. So Abraham’s faith : ‘ By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac ; and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed

<sup>1</sup> Qu. ‘ omnia ’ ?—ED.

be called; accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.' His power, as is his being, is infinite. Therefore, having his word, this should give us rest and contentment of soul, though there be no appearance of performance; the promise is yea and amen, and continueth in one invariable tenour. Let not faith die.

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### SERMON XC.

*Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me.*—VER. 82.

IN this verse the man of God expresseth—(1.) His earnest expectation of the comfort of the promises; (2.) His longing desire after it; as hope is wont to vent itself by serious thoughts, intermixed with strong desires of the blessing promised. His earnest expectation is expressed in the first clause, *mine eyes fail for thy word*. His longing and strong desire in the following words, *saying, When wilt thou comfort me?*

His earnest hope and expectation is first to be considered; and here his hope is described—

1. By the effect, his looking after the accomplishment of the promise; as, Judges v. 28, when Sisera's mother expected him, 'She looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots?' and Rom. viii. 19, 'The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth,' &c.—*ἀποκαρδοκία τῆς κτίσεως*, the lifting up or stretching out of the head, as we use to do when we look for anything, to see if we can spy it coming.

2. By the incident weakness, because of the delay of help, 'Mine eyes fail for thy word.' He had looked and looked long, till he was weary of looking; what he said before of the soul, here he speaketh of his eyes. There the object was salvation, here the word.

Observe, first, that hope keepeth the eye of the soul so fixed upon the promise, that it is ever looking for deliverance and salvation. Hezekiah useth almost the same manner of speech, Isa. xxxviii. 14, 'Mine eyes fail with looking upward,' that is, to God for ease and relief; as when we expect anybody's coming, we send our eyes towards the place from whence he cometh. Reasons:—

1. The children of God make more of a promise than others do, and that upon a double account—partly because they value the blessing promised, partly because they are satisfied by the assurance given by God's word; so that whereas others pass by these things with a careless eye, their souls are lifted up to the constant and earnest expectation of the blessing promised. It is said of the hireling, that he must have his wages before the sun go down, Deut. xxiv. 15, 'Because he is poor, and hath set his heart upon it;' or, as it is in the Hebrew, 'lifted up his soul to it,' meaning thereby both his desire and hope. He esteemeth his wages, for it is the solace of his labours, and the maintenance of his life; and he assuredly expecteth it, upon the promise

and covenant of him who setteth him awork. So it is with the children of God; they esteem the blessings promised, and God's word giveth them good assurance that they do not wait upon him in vain: 1 Tim. iv. 10, 'Therefore we both labour, and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the saviour of all men, especially of those that believe.' They know God is good to all, much more to his covenant servants. They value his salvation, and venture their all upon his salvation and the truth of his word; and therefore lift up their souls to him in the midst of their pressures and difficulties.

2. It is some satisfaction to enjoy the blessing in idea and contemplation, before we have it indeed. Hope causeth a kind of anticipation and pre-union of our souls with the blessedness expected: as heirs live upon their lands before they have them. And that is the reason why joy is made to be the fruit of hope, though it be proper to fruition and enjoyment: Rom. xii. 12, 'Rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.' It refresheth them in their pilgrimage, and affecteth them in some measure as if it were in hand. So Rom. xv. 13, 'The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.' While believing, waiting, hoping, while conflicting with difficulties, they carry themselves as if they had already obtained the thing promised; for by eyeing the promise they are cheered and revived. Hope giveth a foretaste, especially when the comforting Spirit addeth his impression thereunto.

3. The opening of the eye of faith argueth a closing of the eye of sense, which giveth a double benefit—(1.) That we are not withdrawn by vain objects; (2.) Not discouraged with contrary appearances.

[1.] That we are not withdrawn by vain objects. Nothing doth quench zeal and holiness and joy in the Lord, nor cast water upon that sacred fire which should be kindled and kept ever burning in our bosoms, so much as keeping the eye of sense always open to behold the lustre and beauty of worldly vanities. Alas! then hope of heaven and salvation from God is a cold heartless thing; we think of it carelessly, desire and press after it very weakly. But now, when the eye of sense is shut, and the eye of faith kept always open, then hope advanceth itself with life and vigour, and present things seem less, and things to come greater and more glorious in our eyes: 1 Peter i. 13, 'Be sober, and hope to the end,' &c. Sobriety is the moderation of our affections in the pursuit and use of earthly things. The delights of the present life burden the soul, glue it to the earth, and to base and inferior objects; but when our souls are kept in the fresh, lively, and serious expectation of better things, all the things of the world appear more contemptible. It is not for eagles to catch flies, nor for the heirs of promise to be captivated by the delights of sense; so that every day our hope is more certain and powerful, our pursuit more earnest. The mind is not darkened with the fumes of lust, nor diverted from those noble objects.

[2.] The eye of sense being shut, we are not discouraged with contrary appearances, nor with fears and troubles and the trials of the present life, because hope seeth sunshine behind the back of the storm. We have a notable emblem of the eye of faith and the eye of sense in

the prophet and the prophet's man: 2 Kings vi. 15-17, 'When the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city, both with horses and chariots: and his servant said to him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about.' Elisha's man is affrighted with the dreadful appearance of enemies encompassing them round about, and is at his wit's end. 'What shall we do?' But his master Elisha had the eye of faith, and could see great preparations which God had sent for their defence, which the servant could not see; therefore encourageth him, and in a prophetic vision showeth not only more horses and chariots, but chariots of fire, which were no other than the angels of God come together in the manner of a host, to rescue the prophet of God. What was represented to him in a prophetic vision is always evident to faith and to the eyes of a believing soul; they see God and his holy angels set for their deliverance. When God openeth the eyes of the mind, they can see the glory and power of the other world; and then, 'though troubled on every side, yet not distressed; though perplexed, yet not in despair; though persecuted, yet not forsaken; though cast down, yet not destroyed,' 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9, though wrestling with difficulties, yea, brought to some extremities, yet this invisible assistance supporteth them; and though they have little human means, yet God carrieth them on to their expected end and issue.

*Use 1.* To reprove us for poring so much upon present things, and neglecting those to come, especially the great recompense of reward. Alas! men have either none, or cold thoughts of that blessed estate which is offered in the promises. Our thoughts fly up and down like dust in the wind; they may sometimes light upon good things, but they vanish, and abide not. We may have some cold ineffectual glances upon heaven and heavenly things, which fly away, and never leave the soul better. This argueth hope is very weak, if there be any at all; for hope is always longing and looking out for the blessing, sending spies into the land of promise, to bring it tidings thence; it will discover itself not by glances and wishes; for the worst men may have some of these in their good mood and sober thoughts; but by frequent, deep, and ponderous meditations: you do not eye the mark, Phil. iii. 14, nor mind your scope and great end, 2 Cor. iv. 18. Certainly that which must be intended in every righteous action, either formally or virtually—that is, by some noted explicit thought, or by the unobserved act of some potent habit—should be oftener thought of and longed for; you do not live by faith else. For what is living by faith, but withdrawing the mind from present things to things to come, looking beyond and above the world to eternity? 2 Cor. v. 7; Heb. xi. 11. You are not acquainted with the influence of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, for he openeth the eyes of the mind. Why? That you may look above the mists and clouds of the lower world to those good things which we are to enjoy in heaven, Eph. i. 17, 18, and 1 Cor. ii.

12. Alas! we are taken up with trifles and childish toys, have our thoughts little exercised about these nobler objects. Therefore is it that our diligence is so little; for if they were oftener minded, they would be more diligently sought after: Phil. iii. 14, 'I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' Therefore is our patience so little; for the bitterness of the cross would be more sweetened if our minds and meditations were oftener set about heaven and heavenly things, Rom. viii. 18. Therefore are our conversations so worldly, Phil. iii. 19, our desires and longings so cold and weak, so little mind to get home, Phil. i. 23, *πολλῶ μᾶλλον κρείσσον.*

*Use 2.* To press us to eye the promised blessedness more than we do. The promise is our warrant, and the thing promised is the comfort, solace, and support of our souls. The promise must be laid up in the heart with a firm strong assent, and the thing promised ever kept in view. I shall give you the qualifications of this expectation.

1. It must be a serious and earnest expectation: Phil. i. 20, 'According to my earnest expectation, that in nothing I shall be ashamed.' Earnest expectation is that which excitemeth the heart to be ever looking and longing for the things promised. Our eyes are always looking to heaven, which is the seat and solace of our happiness. David describeth his earnestness notably: Ps. cxxx. 5, 6, 'I wait for the Lord; my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning.' The priests, that officiated in their turns, never missed the performance of their daily offices there. So David was still awakening his desires, continuing his daily attendance on God, and renewing his longings and hopes.

2. It is a lively expectation: 1 Peter i. 3, 'Begotten again unto a lively hope.' It is called lively from the effect, such as will put life into us in our damps of spirit and greatest discouragements, quickeneth us to hasten home apace, being animated by some cheerful foretastes of what we expect.

3. It is a constant and unconquerable expectation, not broken with present difficulties, but sustaineth the soul, till our full and final deliverance cometh in hand: Ps. cxxiii. 2, 'As the eyes of servants look unto the hands of their masters, and the eyes of a maiden unto the hands of her mistress; so our eyes wait on the Lord our God, until he have mercy on us.' They never give over waiting and looking till God show mercy: 1 Peter i. 13, 'Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;' and Heb. vi. 11, 'And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end.'

4. It is a sure and certain hope, as being built on God's truth and faithfulness: it is compared to 'an anchor sure and steadfast,' Heb. vi. 18. Why? Because of God's word and oath. God is the supreme verity, who can neither deceive or be deceived; therefore we should rest satisfied with his promise. To a promise, that it be certain and firm, three things are required,—that it be made seriously and heartily, with a purpose to perform it; that he that promiseth continue in this

purpose, without change of mind; that it be in the power of him that promised to perform what is promised. Now of all these things there can be no doubt, if we believe the scriptures to be the word of God.

[1.] Certainly God meaneth as he speaketh when he promiseth to give eternal life to the faithful servants and disciples of Jesus Christ. There is no question but that he is so minded, when he who is truth itself hath told the world of this; for what needed God to court the creature, or tell them of a happiness which he never meant to bestow upon them? If an honest man hath promised anything in his power, we look he should be as good as his word. Yea, we have his oath, which is *πέρας ἀντιλογίας*, and *μεγίστη παρὰ ἀνθρώποις πίστις*. He sent his Son with a commission from heaven to assure us; he is, 'Amen, the faithful witness,' Rev. iii. 14. He wrought miracles to confirm his message, died, rose again, and revived: 1 Peter i. 21, 'Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God.' This message afterwards was confirmed by all kinds of signs and wonders, wrought by them who went abroad in his name to assure the world of this. Not to believe God is serious, is to make him a liar.

[2.] That God doth continue his purpose, there can be no doubt in them who consider his unchangeable nature; he may change his dispensation, but not his purposed will: James i. 17, 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;' Mal. iii. 6, 'I am the Lord, I change not; therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed.'

[3.] That he is able to perform it, since he can do what he will: Rom. iv. 21, 'And being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was also able to perform.' So Phil. iii. 21, 'According to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself.' The most difficult thing in our hope is the raising of our bodies after being eaten by worms and turned to dust. It is a thing incredible, and to flesh and blood wholly impossible; but nothing is impossible to God. It is within the reach and compass of divine omnipotency. Well, then, the thing is sure in itself; let us labour and suffer reproach, wait with patience, renounce the desires and delights of the flesh, and with patience continue in well-doing, and then we may lift up our souls to it. Our reward is sure.

The second point is from the incident weakness, because of the delay of help: 'Mine eyes fail for thy word.' He had his eyes fixed upon the promise till they were quite wearied.

*Doct. 2.* Though his people wait for him, yet God may so long delay and suspend the performance of the promises till they count it a hopeless business.

First, Suspend. The reasons are these:—

1. Not because he is unwilling to give, but because he will have us better prepared to receive: Ps. x. 17, 'Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.' We understand it usually of preparing the heart for prayer, to ask the mercy; but it is also meant of preparing the heart to receive the mercy: 2 Chron. xx. 33, 'The high places were not taken away, because the people had not yet pre-

pared their heart to the God of their fathers;’ they were not fit to have a thorough reformation accomplished in their days. The baker watcheth when the oven is hot, and then puts in the bread. At another time it went on roundly, for God had prepared the people, 2 Chron. xxix. 36. When we are in a posture, mercy will not be long a-coming. Heaven, the great mercy, is not given us till prepared; as heaven is prepared for us, so we for it: Rom. ix. 23, ‘That he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory;’ and Col. i. 12, ‘Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.’ So other mercies; our unpreparedness lieth as a block in the way, and hindereth the free passage of God’s mercy to us, till he send his work before him, &c.: Isa. xl. 10, ‘Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.’

2. To awaken fervency of prayer, and that the blessing may be the more earnestly sought after and highly valued. A thing easily come by doth not stir up such a desire after it. *Τὸ ἔτοιμον εἰς ἔξουσίαν ἀργὸν εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν.* We despise easy-gotten favours, but that which is long and earnestly sought is dearer to us. Therefore the Lord, to commend his favours to us, and to set a price upon them, will have us pray much and long: 1 Sam. i. 27, ‘For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me the petition which I asked of him.’

3. God doth it to prove and exercise our faith. Many of his servants have gone to the grave and his promises not yet accomplished, and yet have gone to the grave in hope: Heb. xi. 13, ‘These all died in faith, not having received the promises’ (that is, things promised), ‘but having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them.’ Then is faith tried when we can wait for the fulfilling of the promises: when we have no present enjoyment, and know not when we shall have, yea, likely never to see it in our days. The patriarchs lived and died believers; delay and non-enjoyment did not break their hearts, nor could death itself extinguish their faith. Death might bereave them of their friends, and their temporal estate, and all their earthly comforts, but of faith it could not.

4. That patience may have its perfect work. It is marvellous patience that can yet wait for the word, when it will yield us the expected comfort, though our eyes fail in waiting. Then is the greatest discovery of its perfection, when difficulties are many, hope long delayed. It hath but a part of its work before, to still the mind under lesser or shorter evils. The perfection of a thing is never discovered till it be put to a full trial. Patience is seen in waiting as well as suffering. To bear a little while is but the imperfect work of patience, some lesser degree of it; as to know a letter or two in the book is but an imperfect kind of reading; but to bear much and long, that is the perfect work. To lift up some heavy thing from the ground argueth some strength; but to carry it for an hour, or all day, is a more perfect thing.

5. God delayeth the accomplishment of his promises, because many times the frame of his providence requireth it. All God’s works have their appointed hour and time, and God will not disturb the order of

causes, or work sooner or later; but as the beautiful frame of his providence doth permit: John ii. 4, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.' Our time wherein we would have him work, and his time wherein he will work, are often very different: for he will not manifest his help when it will please us best, but when his glory in working may be best seen: John vii. 6, 'My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready.'

Secondly, The other branch is, that God may delay so long till they be disheartened, and give it over as a hopeless business. David saith his eyes failed for the word. When a man is disappointed of the things he looketh for, then his eyes are said to fail. So the captive Jews complained, Lam. iv. 17, 'As for us, our eyes have yet failed for our vain help: in our watching, we have waited for a nation that could not save us.'

1. God may delay so long, till his enemies wax high and proud, as if above the reach of all evil, and God had forgotten them, or approved their ways: Ps. l. 21, 'I keep silence, and thou thoughtest I was altogether like thyself.' So long till all their fears are over: Job xxi. 9, 'Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them.' And their oppressions are multiplied: Ps. x. 5, 6, 'His ways are always grievous, for he hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved.'

2. God may delay so long, till a land be wasted by sundry successive common judgments that light upon good and bad, Jer. xii. 4. After the complaint of the prosperity of the wicked, the prophet subjoineth, 'How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of the field wither?' When they relent not, the land may fare the worse for them; and the godly, among the rest, suffer in these general calamities. God may plague the nation with dearth and famine, plague and pestilence, war and sword, fire and burning; and all this while no ceasing of their iniquities or oppressions.

3. God may delay so long till his people be strangely perplexed, and know not what to make of his providence. They wonder how his justice can endure it: Jer. xii. 1, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments; wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?' Hab. i. 12, 13, 'Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine holy one? We shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment, and O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?' They cannot reconcile his attributes and providences. We that are short-sighted, and short-spirited creatures, see not God's reasons; yea, God may delay so long, till their hearts faint, and their eyes fail, as in these two verses; till their faith and patience be quite spent, and they have left looking for it: Luke xviii. 8, 'Shall he find faith on the earth?' God loveth to show his people their infirmity, and to weaken all their courage, before he will do anything for them.

4. God may delay so long in some cases, that there is no hope that God will do anything for them in this life; but all reasons for patience

are only taken from the general judgment: James v. 7, 8, 'Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord; and stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.' They are put off till then, till the general harvest and restitution of all things; and in the mean time they must be content to sow in tears, that they may reap the fruit of their labours and sufferings at that time, and have their cause judged at his tribunal. He useth the similitude of an husbandman: 'Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.' In some cases there may be no hope of our release till then, as the husbandman hath no profit by his seed until the harvest.

*Secondly*, I shall speak of this failing of the eyes.

1. Certainly the failing of the eyes is a fault, because it argueth the limiting of God, which is a great sin: Ps. lxxviii. 41, 'They limited the holy one of Israel.' They limit God to times, means, instruments, present likelihood, and when these fail, their hearts fail. God cannot endure that his people, who ought wholly to depend upon him, and submit to him, should prescribe to him how or when he should help, as if they had a power of God, or could set bounds to his wisdom, mercy, omnipotency: all which are, as if he could do no more than what they conceive probable, or should act when they conceive fitting; and if he doth not then, that he never will, or can do it. They prescribe to his wisdom, control his power, question his love and truth.

2. As it is a fault, so it is a punishment. Though David here saith, 'Mine eyes fail with waiting,' for that salvation and mercy which thou hast promised in the word, yet it is the usual judgment of the wicked, one of the curses of the law. It is said, Deut. xxviii. 32, 'Thy sons and daughters shall be given to another people, and thine eyes shall fail, in looking and longing for them all the day long.' They should look and long for some help, for the rescuing of their children, even till their eyes did fail in waiting, but all in vain: so Job xi. 20, 'The eyes of the wicked shall fail them, they shall not escape, but their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost.' They may look for good, but never get the sight of it. Again, Deut. xxviii. 65, 'The Lord shall give thee trembling of heart and failing of eyes.' But though failing of eyes be a curse of the law, yet Christ became a curse for us. It is said in his name, Ps. lxxix. 3 (for that psalm belongeth to Christ), 'Mine eyes fail in waiting for my God.' And so it is altered to us; it is a correction to humble us, and fit us for better things.

3. Though it be a sin and punishment, yet the fault is not in God's delay, but in the weakness and faintness of our hope. There was a fault in our first resolution for faith and patience. The children of God usually set to themselves a shorter period than the Lord doth. And so God is not slack, but we are hasty: 2 Peter iii. 9, 'The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.' And there is a weakness in the exercise of our faith and patience. They that look long for good, and the succour of his promises, the delay is troublesome to them. 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick,' Prov. xiii. 12. Hope belongeth to

love; and the affections of pursuit and love maketh absence tedious when afflicted in the interim; but faith and dependence upon God should keep us waiting, and patience should enable us to tarry his leisure: Jonah ii. 4, 'I said, I am cast out of thy sight, yet I will look again toward the holy temple.' There is our fault, that we give over hope and calling upon God, and depending on him, and holding fast on his covenant and promise, which we should not do. When God seemeth to turn his back on the saints, yet they will not forsake him.

4. The hopes of God's children fail them long, though not for ever. He many times bringeth his children to a low ebb, and doth for a long time withhold his aid, yet he doth not altogether forsake them: Isa. liv. 7, 8, 'For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy redeemer.'

*Use.* Well, then, let us not be over-troubled at the delay of the promised and expected blessings.

1. We are hasty for mercy, slow to duty: Ps. cii. 2, 'When I call, answer me speedily.' We cry, How long? But how justly may God cry, How long? We complain of the delay of the promise; God may more justly complain of the delay of our obedience. How long do we make God stay and wait till our leisure come? Jer. iv. 14, 'O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?' and Jer. xiii. 27, 'O Jerusalem, wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?' To-day, now is the time we set God for mercy, to-morrow for duty. God must tarry our sinful leisure, and we will not tarry his holy leisure. God is our sovereign, we are debtors to him. Ours is a debt, his a free gift. If God had been as quick with you as you with him, where had you been?

2. It argueth weakness; a short walk is a long journey to the weak and sickly. It is the impatience of our flesh and the weakness of our faith. We would make short work for faith and patience, but God seeth then our graces would not be found to any praise and honour. God is the best judge of opportunities, therefore all must be left to his will and pleasure. Faith will not count it long; for to the eye of faith things future and afar off are as present: Heb. xi. 1, 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' It is said, Isa. xxviii. 16, 'He that believeth shall not make haste.' Sense and carnal confidence must have present satisfaction, but faith contents itself with promises. Love will not count it long; for seven years to Jacob seemed as a few days, Gen. xxix. 20. Sufferings for Christ would not be so tedious, where love prevaieth. Patience would not count it long. Cannot we tarry for him a little while? Heb. x. 37, 'Yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry,' *ἔτι γὰρ μικρὸν ὄσον ὄσον.* We love our own ease, and therefore the cross groweth irksome and tedious.

3. God is a God of judgment: Isa. xxx. 18, 'And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him.' Mercy will

not come one jot too soon nor one jot too late ; in the fittest time for God to give and us to receive : Heb. iv. 16, *εὐκαιρον βοήθειαν*, 'In the time of need.' We think we stay for God, but he stayeth for us. If we were ripe for mercy, God is always ready, for he is a present help : Ps. xlv. 1, 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.'

I come now to the second clause, his longing desire after it, *saying*, *When wilt thou comfort me?* that is, David was ever and anon repeating and saying, 'Lord, when?' The Hebrews express their wishes by way of question : Oh, that thou wouldest comfort me!

*Doct. 3.* When our hope and help is delayed, we may complain to God for want of comfort.

1. What is the comfort which David intendeth? In the general, consolation is opposed to grief and mourning. Sin hath woven calamities into our lives, and filled us with griefs, troubles, and sorrows, so that we need comfort. Comfort is either eternal, spiritual, or temporal.

[1.] Eternal : 2 Thes. ii. 16, 'Everlasting consolation and good hope through grace ;' Luke xvi. 25, 'Remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus evil things ; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.'

[2.] Spiritual, which is of two sorts :—

(1.) Comfort against the trouble of sin ; in which respect the Holy Ghost is called the Comforter. In this respect the Holy Ghost biddeth them comfort the penitent incestuous person, 2 Cor. ii. 7.

(2.) Against affliction : so God is said to 'comfort those that are cast down,' 2 Cor. vii. 6 ; and Ps. xciv. 19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul ;' 2 Cor. i. 3, 4, 'Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.'

[3.] Temporal ; so God is said to comfort those whom he freeth from afflictions : Ps. lxxi. 21, after deep and sore troubles, 'Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side.' So the Lord comforteth his people, not by word only, but also by deed ; not only by speaking comfort to them, but also by relieving them, and refreshing them, and freeing them from their troubles. So Isa. lii. 9, 'Sing, ye waste places, for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.' Though God's people lay low for a time, yet his blessing can exalt them beyond all expectation, and bring about such happiness as may make them forget their sorrows and miseries. This is intended here : Lord, when wilt thou give that deliverance which I pray for, and wait for at thy hands? Let it not seem strange that temporal deliverance should be owned as a comfort to God's people. Partly because they are acts of God's providence and dispensations of his grace, sought not<sup>1</sup> in a way of faith and prayer : Zech. i. 17, 'The Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.' Partly because by these he seemeth to own them, and

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'out' ? or 'for' ?—ED.

confirm them in the privilege of his peculiar care, and that they have an interest in his favour; which by sad afflictions seemed to be annulled and made void. But hereby God giveth proof of his favour to them: Ps. lxxxvi. 17, 'Show me a token for good, that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed; because thou, Lord, hast holpen me, and comforted me;' that in their affliction godliness may not suffer, nor wicked men be hardened in their insolency. Partly as hereby promises are made good, and so faith confirmed: Isa. lvii. 18, 'I will heal him, and restore comforts to him, and to his mourners.' Partly as they are helps and encouragements to love and praise God, and to live in a thankful course of holiness, when not stopped or diverted by fear of enemies: Isa. xii. 1, 'In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.' We may serve God more cheerfully then. Partly because as they have seen his wisdom and justice in their troubles, so now his power and grace and truth in their deliverance. They are more comfortable, because there is much of God discovered in them, Ps. cxv. 1. Lastly, because they are comfortable to the natural life. They are not so divested of all human respects. Yet therein the saints moderate themselves; they do not count these things their highest consolation. So it is said of the wicked, Luke vi. 24, 'Woe unto you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation;' and Luke xvi. 25, 'Thou receivedst thy good things.' Yet a sense they have, otherwise how can we be humbled under crosses, or give thanks for blessings?

2. We may complain of the delay of comfort. God's children have done so: Ps. vi. 3, 'But thou, O Lord, how long?' Ps. xiii. 1, 'How long wilt thou forget me, Lord? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?' so ver. 2, 'How long shall mine enemies triumph over me?' Ps. xciv. 3, 4, 'Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? How long shall they utter, and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?' Reasons:—

[1.] Partly because prayer giveth ease; it is a vent to strong affections.

[2.] It reviveth the work of faith, hope, and patience.

[3.] Though God knoweth when to bestow blessings, yet he will not blame the desires of his children after them.

*Use.* Well, then, let us seek comfort, and complain not of God, but to God. Complaints of God give a vent to murmurings; but complaints to God, to faith, hope, and patience.

1. Refer the kind of comfort to God, whether he will give temporal deliverance, a comfortable sense of his love, or hopes of glory, a clearer right and title to eternal rest.

2. Yea, refer the thing itself. Comfort is necessary, because a great part of our temptations lie in troubles as well as allurements. Sense of pain may discompose us, as well as pleasure entice us. The world is a persecuting as well as a tempting world. The flesh troubleth as well as enticeth. The devil is a disquieting as well as an ensuaring devil. But yet comfort, though necessary, is not so necessary as holiness. Therefore, though comfort is not to be despised, yet sincere love to God is to be preferred; and though it be not dispensed so

certainly, so constantly, and in so high a degree in this world, we must be contented. The Spirit's comforting work is oftener interrupted than the work of holiness; so much as is necessary to our employment for God in the world we shall have.

3. Comfort is raised in us by the Spirit of God: Acts ix. 31, 'Then had the churches rest, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.' For means we have his word, his promises, and also his providence. His word: Rom. xv. 4, 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.' His promises: Ps. cxix. 50, 'This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me;' Heb. vi. 17, 18, 'Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.' And also his providence, protection, and defence: Ps. xxiii. 4, 'Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.' The rod and staff are spoken of as instruments of defence.

4. Consider how ready God is to comfort his people: Isa. xl. 1, 2, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.' When time serveth, God sendeth these messages.

## SERMON XCI.

*For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy precepts.*—VER. 83.

HERE is rendered a reason why he doth so earnestly beg for comfort and deliverance. The reason is taken from his necessity, he was scarce able to bear any longer delay of comfort. Not only his faith and hope was spent, but his body was even spent through the trouble that was upon him. He had told us, in the 81st verse, 'My soul fainteth for thy salvation;' in the 82d verse, 'Mine eyes fail for thy word;' and now, 'I am become like a bottle in the smoke,' &c.

Observe here—(1.) His condition represented; (2.) His resolution maintained. Or—

First, The heat of tribulation, *I am become like a bottle in the smoke.*

Secondly, His constant perseverance in his duty, *Yet do I not forget thy precepts.*

1. His condition is represented by the similitude of a bottle in the smoke, alluding therein to a bottle of skin, such as the Jews used; as in Spain their wine is put into borachos, or bags made of hog-skins, *ἄσκῳ ἐν ἀργεῖῳ* in Homer; in a vessel or bottle of goat-skin. And Christ's similitude of old bottles and new bottles relateth thereunto,

Mat. ix. 17; for he meaneth it of skin-bottles or bladders, if such a bottle be hung up in the smoke, and by that means becometh black, parched, and dry. The man of God thought this a fit emblem of his condition. The Septuagint reads *ἐν πάχυνη*, 'in the frost.' *Kitor* signifieth any fume or vapour, whether of smoke or mist; as Ps. cxlviii. 8, 'Fire and hail, snow and vapour.' The word for vapour is the same with this which is here rendered smoke. Here it signifieth smoke rather than vapour or mist.

2. His resolution, 'Yet do I not forget thy precepts.' *I do not forget*; that is, I do not decline from or neglect my duty; as Heb. xiii. 16, 'To distribute and communicate forget not,' that is, neglect it not. As on God's part, when he will not perform what belongeth to him, being hindered by our disobedience, he threateneth to forget his people, Jer. xxiii. 39, that is, will not deliver them; so we forget God's precepts when we do not fulfil, or neglect, our duty. Now, forget God's precepts he might either as his comfort or his rule; both ways must the word be improved and remembered by us; yet because the notion of precepts is here used, I understand the latter. Oiten is this passage repeated in this psalm; as ver. 51, 'The proud have had me greatly in derision, yet have I not declined from thy law.' Though scorned and made a mockage by those that were at ease, and lived in pomp and splendour, yet his zeal was not abated. Ver. 61, 'The bands of the wicked have robbed me; yet have I not forgotten thy law.' Though plundered by the violence of soldiers; so ver. 109, 'My soul is continually in my hand; yet do I not forget thy law;' that is, though he was in danger of death continually. We have it again, ver. 141, 'I am small and despised; yet do I not forget thy law;' though contemned and slighted as a useless creature, and one that might be well spared in the world. So in the text, 'I am become like a bottle in the smoke,' though wrinkled and shrivelled with age and sorrow. Thus in all temptations David's love to God and his ways was not abated.

*Doct.* That though our trials be never so sharp and tedious, yet this must not lessen our respect to God or his word.

In handling this point I shall show you three things:—

1. That God may exercise his children with sharp and tedious afflictions.

2. That these afflictions are apt to draw us into manifold sins and errors of practice.

3. That yet this should not be; a gracious heart should withstand the shock of temptations.

For the first, David is an instance, whose sad complaint we have had continued for three verses together. I shall only now open the similitude in the text, whereby he representeth his condition.

1. A bottle in the smoke is dry and wrinkled and shrunk up; so he was worn out and dried up with sorrow and long suspense of expectation. This noteth the decay of his bodily strength. So also elsewhere: Ps. cii. 3, 'My days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burnt as an hearth.' And he saith, Ps. xxxii. 4, 'Thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.' His chief sap, oil, was spent, *humidum radicale*. As a leathern sack, long hung up in a smoking chimney, so was he dried up, and

shrivelled and wrinkled by long-continued troubles and adversity. We are told, Prov. xvii. 22, that a 'merry heart doth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones.' A cheerful heart helpeth well to recover health lost, but a sad one breedeth diseases, as we see grief is often the cause of death. Now so it may often be with God's children. God may so follow them with afflictions that sorrow may waste their natural strength, and they may have such hard and long trials as to make them go into wrinkles, and what by temporal sorrows, troubles of conscience or sickness, the infirmities of age may be hastened upon them.

2. A bottle in the smoke is blacked and smutched, whereby is meant that his beauty was wasted as well as his strength; and as he was withered, so he was black with extreme misery: Job xxx. 30, 'My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burnt with heat.' So Lam. v. 10, 'Our skin was black as an oven, because of the terrible famine.' So Lam. iv. 8, 'Their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their bones, it is withered, it is become like a stick.' So here 'like a bottle in the smoke.' And you must consider that this was spoken of David, that ruddy youth, of whom it was said, 1 Sam. xvi. 12, 'Now he was ruddy, of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to.' But great sorrows had made an alteration, and afflictions do quickly cause the beauty of the body to fade: Ps. xxxix. 11, 'When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth.' God's rod may leave sad marks and prints upon the body, which do not only waste our strength, but deface our beauty. Observe here the difference between the beauty and strength of the body and of the soul. The beauty of the soul groweth fairer by afflictions, whereas that of the body is blasted. David was a bottle shrivelled and shrunk up, yet the holy frame of his soul was not altered; his beauty was gone, but not his grace. Outward beauty is but skin-deep; turn it inside out, it is but blood and rawness. It fadeth by sickness, age, troubles of conscience, and great and manifold afflictions. Once more; in the sight of God a man is never the more uncomely, though he be as a skin-bottle in the smoke, if he doth not 'forget his statutes;' if he be outwardly deformed, but yet the hidden man of the heart be well adorned, even with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price, 1 Peter iii. 3, 4. Any great affliction soon maketh an impression upon the skin. This flower of beauty is soon blown off; age or sickness will soon shrivel it up, and make it look like a bottle in the smoke; but let us regard the beauty of the soul, which fadeth not.

3. A dried bottle in the smoke is contemned and cast aside and of no use; so was David no more esteemed and regarded among men than such a bottle would be; and to this Christ alludeth, Mat. ix. 17, 'Men do not put new wine into old bottles, lest the bottles break, and the wine runneth out and perisheth.' An old, dry shrivelled bottle is good for nothing, the force of wine will soon break and rend it, therefore it is cast away as a thing of no use. So many times, to the great grief of their hearts, may God's children be laid aside as useless vessels. The world may cast them off as unworthy to live among

them: 'It is not for the king's profit to suffer them,' Esther iv. 8; and 1 Cor. iv. 13, *περικαθήρματα*, 'We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things.' So Heb. xiii. 13, 'Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.' At that time they were cast out of the synagogues, or cities and societies. Was not Christ himself cast off, 'despised and rejected of men'? Isa. liii. 3, 'The stone which the builders refused;' though he were the corner-stone of the building, yet they laid him aside as if he were of no use, as rubbish, or a refuse stone. So are his people thrust out by the world, laid by, as not deemed worthy to be employed for any use: Acts xxii. 22, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live.' This is the judgment which the world maketh on God's servants.

Secondly, What are the usual sins which are incident to such sharp and tedious afflictions?

1. Impatience and murmuring against God. When our wills are crossed we cannot bear it. To be sick of the fret is a disease very incident to such as have not learned to deny their own wills, and entirely to give up themselves to the conduct of God's providence: Gen. xxx. 1, 'Give me children, or I die;' Ps. xxxvii. 1, 'Fret not thyself because of evil-doers.' We should not vex and fret, but we are apt to do so, to murmur and repine against God, and that for small matters, as Jonah for a gourd: 'I do well to be angry,' Jonah iv. 9. So strangely are men transported! Pettish desires earnestly solicited, and finally disappointed, breed this impatience in us. In every frame of heart, when notably stirred, we should say, Is this well? God puts the question to Jonah, 'Dost thou well to be angry?' What! to be discontented with God's own providence, especially in small matters? But we let loose the reins to our passions, and if we be crossed a little, then 'Let me die.' Some of this impatience was in good David, for it presently followeth the text, ver. 84, 'How many are the days of thy servant?' If the affliction must last yet longer, then even let me know when I shall die.

2. A spirit of revenge against the instruments of our trouble. When we dare not let fly against God, we vent our passions freely against men, and seek their hurt and loss, and think we are safe. Whereas Christianity establisheth a universal and diffusive charity, even to enemies, that we should pray for them, and seek their good: Mat. v. 44, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.' The command of love doth not extend only towards kindred and friends and acquaintance, but even to enemies. I say unto you, Christ will try our sincerity and obedience by this precept, by forgiving wrongs, and forbearing all unjust and unmerciful revenge, and our love by loving our enemies. It is hard to bring the revengeful heart of man to it. The faults they have committed against us do not exempt us from the general law of charity, from doing good to them according to our power. As we must not hate or curse, or requite injury with injury, so we must love, bless, do good, and pray for them, wishing them all the good in the world, especially that which they most want, the good of their souls; returning friendly words for

railing and evil speaking; feeding and clothing them when hungry, thirsty, or naked; desiring pardon and grace. This is our rule; but how few Christians comply with it, and conquer their unruly passions! No; rather justify them by the greatness of their temptations, and if they be kept from retaliating of injuries, that is rare. Most have too great a coldness and indifference for enemies: Prov. xxiv. 29, 'I will do so to him as he hath done to me; I will render to the man according to his work.' This is to take the work out of God's hands, to review<sup>1</sup> the arrogance of Adam, 'Be as gods.' Generally men are vindictive and transported with uncomely passions when wronged by men: 2 Sam. xvi. 9, 'Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head.' This was the ruffling humour of Abishai; but David was in a calmer, cooler frame and temper of spirit: No; 'God bid him curse.' Many a man can bear afflictions, but not injuries. No man is troubled at a shower of rain, but if one cast a bucket or basin of water upon us, we shall not let it pass, if it be in the power of our hands, without revenge.

3. Using indirect means for our relief. It is better to pine away in affliction than to be freed from it by sin, to be as a bottle in the smoke than to forget our duty; therefore no trouble should drive us to sin, or to use sinful means for our escape; though worn out with expectation, let our duty hold our hands from evil. Whatever our trouble be, from the hand of God or men, we have no reason to go to the devil to ease us of it; as Saul goeth to the witch of Endor: 1 Sam. xxviii. 7, 'Seek me out a woman that hath a familiar spirit.' And to the devil we go when we use bad means. Carnal shifts are very natural to us, and when we cannot trust God, and depend upon him, we presently are apt to take some indirect course of our own. Affliction is often compared to a prison, and the sorrows which accompany it to fetters and chains. Now, God, that puts us into prison, can only help us out again, for he is the governor and judge of the world. Now, to use carnal shifts is an attempt to break prison. We are not able to hold out till God send a happy issue, but take some carnal course of our own. If the heart be not the better resolved, thus it will be. The devil will make an advantage of our afflictions, if he can; he tempted Christ when he was hungry, Mat. iv. 3, so he tempteth us when he seeth us needy, disgraced, reproached, trampled under foot. No; though our estate be low, and the fountain of our supplies be dried up, though our credit be smutched and blacked with slander and reproach, though we be cast out as useless things, as an old withered skin-bottle, counted unfit to hold wine, yet we must not forget God's precepts. We need not take a sinful course for the vindication of our credit from unjust reproaches: Isa. li. 7, 'Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law: fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings.' You that make reckoning of keeping close to my word, that have my law not only in your heads, but in your hearts, God hath his times to vindicate you; you need not distrust the providence of God under straits. When Jacob was low, he tells Laban, 'My righteousness shall answer for me,' Gen. xxx. 33. The hand of God will help us and reward honest

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'revive'?—ED.

labours, without our being false or unfaithful to men. We need not make a foul retreat in the day of trial, nor shift for ourselves by complying with the lusts of men, nor wax weary of our duty as quite discouraged and disheartened, Heb. xii. 3. as we are apt to do when troubles are grievous, and long continued.

4. Another evil is desponding and distrustful thoughts of God. David, after all his experiences, was surpris'd with this kind of thoughts: 1 Sam. xxvii. 1, 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.' He had a particular promise and assurance of the kingdom, and had seen much of God's care over him, and yet after all this David doubted of the word of God, and bewrayed his weakness of faith and affiance in him, who had watched over him, and delivered him out of many great and imminent dangers in a marvellous manner, when there was less appearance of hope than now, 1 Sam. xxii. 5; so Ps. xxxi. 22, 'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless, thou heardest the voice of my supplications, when I cried unto thee.' God hath no more care and thought of me than if I were not. This was said at the very time when deliverance was coming. Here David yielded a little to foolish haste, and lost the staidness of his faith: so Ps. lxxvii. 7, 8, 'Will the Lord cast off for ever? will he be favourable no more? is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore?' Questions to appearance full of despair and despondency, yet there is some faith couched under them. Will the Lord cast off? It implieth the soul cannot endure to be thrust from him. Will he be favourable no more? It implieth some former experience, and desire of new proof. Is his mercy clean gone? I have deserved all this, but God is merciful. Will not mercy help? To appearance indeed despair carrieth it from faith; that is uppermost.

5. Questioning our interest in God merely because of the cross. Our Lord hath taught us to say *My God* in the bitterest agonies; but few learn this lesson: Judges vi. 13, 'If God be with us, why is all this befallen us?' As if they were never exercised with trouble who have God with them. Sometimes we question the love of God because we have no afflictions, and anon because we have nothing but afflictions; as if God were not the God of the valleys as well as of the mountains, and his love did change with our outward condition, and worldly prosperity were a mark of grace, which, when lost, our evidence were gone. How hardly soever God dealeth with his people, yet he loveth them: Heb. xii. 6, 'Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth;' so Rev. iii. 19, 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.' A father is a father when he smileth and when he frowneth; he may have love in his heart when a rod in his hand; and we have no reason to question our adoption merely because we are put under the correction and discipline of the family.

6. Not only despairing thoughts do arise, but atheistical thoughts, as if there were no God, no providence, no distinction between good and evil, and it were in vain to serve him: Ps. lxxiii. 13, 'I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.' The flesh is importunate to be pleased, and therefore, when it meeteth not with desired satisfaction, we are apt to question all, and to cast off the

fear of God, and all regard of his service: Mal. iii. 14, 'Ye have said, It is in vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?' When temptations are sore, and afflictions tedious, thoughts of so horrid a complexion may float in our minds.

These are the distempers which are incident to those who have been long afflicted, and are often disappointed in the issue which they expect.

Thirdly, That this should not be. David omitted not his duty for all this, though his troubles were long and tedious. How great soever our trials be, they should not weaken our love to God and our respect to his word. God's precepts must not be forgotten, though we are withered and dried up with sorrows, as a skin-bottle is shrivelled in the smoke.

1. Because then we plunge ourselves into a greater evil, if we fall into sin because of trouble and affliction, and so make our condition so much the worse. Job's friends charged this upon him, that he had chosen sin rather than affliction, Job xxxvi. 21, when he would rather give way to impatience than patiently bear what God had laid upon him. Many are so transported with their pains and grievances that they care not what they say or do, as if they were loosed from all bands of duty. On the contrary, it is said of Moses, Heb. xi. 25, 'Choosing rather to suffer afflictions,' &c. The least sin is worse than the greatest suffering. Suffering is an offence done to us; sin is an offence done to God. By suffering we lose some worldly comfort, but by sinning hazard the favour of God. Suffering is only an inconvenience to the bodily or animal life; sinning bringeth a blot and blemish upon the soul. The sinful state is far worse than the afflicted. And therefore, how calamitous soever our condition be, we must take great care it be not sinful. Wormwood is bitter, but not poison.

2. A sincere love to God will make us adhere to him when he seemeth to deal most hardly with us. Among all his corrections, God hath not a rod smart enough to drive away a gracious and loving soul from himself: Ps. xlv. 17, 'All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, nor dealt falsely in thy covenant.' God is the same, and his ways are the same, though his dispensations be changed; so different a thing it is to love the ways of God upon foreign and upon intrinsic and proper reasons; and the intent of such dispensations is to put us upon trial,—what be our reasons and motives why we love God and his ways, and whether our love be strong enough to encounter with difficulties, whether it can overcome temptations from sense and the world. Till all probabilities be spent, and our afflictions grow long and tedious, we are not tried to the purpose. Our covenant vow to God bindeth us to own him in all conditions, whatever our portion be in the world.

3. By forgetting God's precepts we put away our own comfort from ourselves, and make our afflictions the more grievous. Take the word *precepts* either strictly, for his commandments or statutes, or more largely, as it may also include his promises. If any faint and fail in trouble, it is because they trust not the promises, or keep not the commandments of God: these two mutually strengthen one another. If

you would not have your faith broken, labour to keep the commandments. In the 166th verse of this psalm, 'I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.' And if you would keep the commandments, confirm your faith in the promises of forgiveness of sin, of God's providence, and eternal life; for if thou canst believe these, no pleasure or pain shall make thee forsake thy obedience, Ps. cxxx. 4. A child of God dareth not warp and turn away from God, in part or in whole, nor slacken any part of his diligence in God's service. Faith in God's promises breedeth obedience, and obedience confirmeth faith in God's promises. We apprehend promises to check that sensitive lure which would entice us from God and our obedience to him. A greater benefit is offered to counterbalance the baits and troubles of the flesh. The more we obey the precepts the more we believe the promises; for together with our obedience, our confidence and sound comfort increaseth: so that to forget the word is to throw away our strength from ourselves.

4. Afflictions rightly improved are a means to make us remember God's precepts rather than to forget them, Heb. xii. 11. The baits of the flesh are removed that the spirit may be more at liberty, 2 Cor. iv. 16. God seeth fit to afflict the bodies of his people sometimes. The body, being in good plight, is a clog to the soul; therefore they are withered and wrinkled that the soul may thrive the more. Our worldly portion is blasted that our heavenly treasure may be increased. When we are at full we wax wanton, neglectful, forget his precepts. Now, that we may remember them the more, God sendeth such afflictions which sit near and close. The moon is never eclipsed but when it is at full; so many have eclipsed the glory of the spiritual life when full and at ease: therefore in afflictions we should not forget his word.

*Use 1.* To reprove us who are so soon discouraged in the ways of God. If we suffer but a little sickness, and a little trouble and contempt in the world, a little loss of honour and interest, the mocks and scorns of foolish men, we cannot bear it, but murmur and are impatient. David could submit himself to the Lord, and find sweetness in the word, though he were 'like a bottle in the smoke.' Few now-a-days suffer any great matter for Christ. Surely when God's people have endured harder things, we should be ashamed of our tenderness. Were we only appointed to escape the afflictions and inconveniences of our pilgrimage? And must God make a new way to heaven for our sakes, wherein we shall meet with no difficulty in our passage? Or rather, in defiance of all sense, would we abide here for ever, and flourish in ease and plenty, and never see change? No; it cometh us betimes to prepare for the cross. None so strong now but they shall wither, so ruddy and beautiful but their beauty shall consume as a moth; nor so happy and flourishing in honour and esteem but they will be laid aside as a dried, withered bottle. We must look to have our turn, and bear it patiently.

2. Let us not for any afflictions and troubles whatsoever abate of our zeal and diligence and respect to God's service.

First, It is not obedience to God's precepts or godliness that is the cause of our sufferings and chastenings, but our sin and folly: Micah ii. 7, 'Are these his doings? do not my words do good to him that

walketh uprightly?' God delighteth not in dealing harshly with his people. The rod is not that he taketh pleasure in, if our case do not call for it: Lam. iii. 33, 'He afflicts not willingly.' We provoke him to it. And shall we grow weary of his service because we suffer justly for our sins? There is reason indeed why we should grow weary of sin, Jer. ii. 19; we find the bitterness of it; but no reason why we should grow weary of duty. Sin less and suffer less. Provoke not God, and nothing will proceed from him but what is good and comfortable; he doth not punish or chasten men for holiness and well-doing; no, it is for want of holiness. Shall the physician be blamed for the trouble of physic, when the patient hath contracted a surfeit that makes it necessary? It was sin in general brought us into a state of suffering, and particular errors that actually bring it on.

Secondly, The benefits and fruit of afflictions should allay and abundantly recompense the trouble of them, that they should not be a hindrance or a snare, but a help to godliness. They prevent our surfeit of worldly prosperity, which would cost us dearer than all the troubles of the flesh which we meet with. Alas! what sad work doth honour and wealth and power make in the world! Blessed be God that he keepeth us under, low, humble, and contemned, like bottles in the smoke. Shall a little affliction, which saveth us from these opportunities of discovering our corruption, be so resented by us as that we should wax weary of God and forget his precepts? Great and long prosperity would be a sorer temptation to us than sharp and tedious affliction; the one keepeth us modest and humble, whereas the other would make us vain and proud and wanton. 'When Jeshurun waxed fat he kicked:' Deut. xxxii. 15, 'He forsook God that made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation;' slighted God, and grew cold in duty, ready to sin. As a rank soil breedeth weeds, a pleasant estate doth but fill us with vanity and folly.

Thirdly, God in good time will send help and deliverance. If we remember to plead the promise, God will remember to fulfil the promise. And those who are not unmindful of their duty, God will not be unmindful of their safety: Mal. iii. 16, 'The Lord hearkened and heard; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for those that feared the Lord, and thought upon his name.' You see there that God will not forget those that forget not his word. Those that keep their feet in the worst times, when others reel and stagger, God hath a great care of them. Every word you speak for God, every inconvenience you suffer for him, every duty you perform to him, it is all upon record.

Fourthly, We may with the more confidence recommend our case to God: Ps. cxix. 153, 'Consider mine affliction, and deliver me, for I do not forget thy law.' They that do not make haste to deliver themselves, God will deliver them. The same God that requireth duty doth assure them of comfort.

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## SERMON XCII.

*The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.—*  
VER. 85.

THIS verse containeth a complaint against his enemies, whereas most of the other verses express his affection to the law of God. Yea, this verse strongly implieth it; for he censureth and condemneth his enemies mainly upon this ground, because they did what they pleased, without any regard to that law which he himself took to be the rule of his duty, and the charter of his hopes and happiness. Observe three things:—

1. The character of David's enemies, *the proud*.
2. Their practice, or subtle and treacherous dealing with him, *they have digged pits for me*.
3. David's censure of that practice, or their manifest iniquity, *which are not after thy law*.

Let us explain the words.

*The proud*.—In the scripture it signifieth—(1.) Either the wicked in general: Ps. cxix. 21, 'Thou hast rebuked the proud which are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.' It is a horrible arrogance to oppose God's laws and interests in the world. (2.) More particularly such as are puffed up with worldly happiness and success, and so either Saul's or Absalom's counsellors may be intended.

*Have digged pits for me*.—A metaphorical phrase, usual in scripture, to represent the secret plots and treacherous dealings of wicked enemies; an allusion to them who dig pits to take wild beasts. In the Greek it is, 'They have told me tales.' Though this rendering was occasioned by a mistake of the word, yet it agreeth well enough with the sense, for this digging of pits by false pretences and ensnaring counsels: Prov. xvi. 27, 'An ungodly man diggeth up evil, and in his lips there is as a burning fire.' But let us keep to the translation we have. The manner of toils among the Jews was digging pits, and covering them over, and hiding snares in them, that as the beast pressed the clod, and fell therein, he might be caught, and kept from getting out again. Therefore David saith, Ps. xxxv. 7, 'Without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul.'

*Which are not after thy law*.—Heb., 'Not after thy law.' It may refer to the men or the practice; who walk not according to thy law, or which fraudulent practices of theirs are not agreeable to thy law. The law of God condemned pits for tame beasts: Exod. xxi. 33, 34, 'If a man open a pit, or dig a pit, and not cover it, and an ox or ass fall therein, the owner of the pit shall make it good, and give money to the owners of them.' Though it was lawful for hunters to take wild beasts, yet they were to take heed that a tame beast fell not therein, at their peril. Yet not for men innocent, and holy men. But there is a *litotes* in the words. That is said not to be good or well done which is extremely evil, very contrary to thy law. Thus we are wont

to speak of a thing horrid in terms of extenuation; as when we speak of a fact, It is not very commendable, when we mean it is extremely abominable. So crafty and subtle dealing consenteth not with the truth of God's word; that is, it is extremely opposite to it. This is produced by David as a ground of his confidence, why he hoped he should not be taken in these pits. These practices were not only injurious to himself, but contemptuous of the law of God. He layeth forth his enemies' carriage before God. Note—

1. That secret plottings against the interests of God and his people in the world are an ancient practice.

2. That these plots usually begin in pride.

3. That God can, when he will, and usually doth, protect his people against the plots of the proud, or the fraud as well as the violence of enemies.

4. That God's law forbiddeth all mischievous, ungodly, treacherous designs, attempts, and actions.

5. That the innocent should not be much troubled to be maligned and hated by them who contemn God's laws, as well as oppose his people.

I shall gloss on these points, and then close all with application.

First point. That secret plottings against the interest of God and his people are an ancient practice.

David here complaineth that the proud had digged pits for him; and Ps. xxxvii. 12, 'The wicked plotteth against the just;' yea, ver. 7, it is a description of a wicked man, 'The man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.' It is so known a practice that it is gotten into their name and style. A wicked man's brain is a forge that is always hot. So Ps. vii. 14, 'Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood.' Wicked men conceive, and then travail, but usually the birth proveth abortive. To represent the truth to you, I shall give you a draught of some of the designs of wicked men:—(1.) For the suppressing of God's interest and people in the world. (2.) Private persons.

For the *first*, you cannot imagine that I should unravel all the secrets of the kingdom of darkness, and break open the devil's cabinet. I shall only point at some few plots and contrivances for the ruin of God's interest in the world.

First, Plots to foment and promote divisions, either between them and themselves, them and their rulers, or them and God himself.

1. Them and themselves. Ever since God had a people in the world, the devil and his instruments have sought to divide them, that they may first ruin one another, and then become a prey to their common adversaries. Nothing hath hindered the growth of Christianity so much as the spirit of division. *Πολλοὺς χριστιανίζειν ἀπέτραπεν* (Sozomen). And Chrysostom's *ἦλθεν ἔθνικος τις*, in his homilies upon the Acts: there came a certain ethnic to him, and told him, I would fain be a Christian, but there are so many parties among you that I know not to whom I should join myself. And Christ's prayer intimates, John xvii. 21, 'That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me,' &c. The world are apt to look upon Christ as an impostor, and his religion as a fond superstition, when they see his people so

divided and scattered one from another. Divisions in the church breed atheism in the world. Now Satan and wicked men have endeavoured all they can to keep up these divisions and hatred among Christians. This was Julian the apostate's design. When he had a mind to suppress Christianity, he did not openly persecute it, but took the worst sort of Christians and upheld them, that they might still maintain a quarrel between them and others. In Germany the Jesuits go over to the Lutherans to keep up the difference; they blow the coals, and then warm themselves by the flame. And among us the envious man hath sown tares: 'Is not the hand of Joab in all this?' By what spirit are the Quakers and others acted, and why are these things kept up, but to render Christianity odious? Sanballat and Tobias set up a party among the Jews to hinder the work of their restoration, Ezra iv. 4, that they might foment division among them, and so hinder the growth of the people's prosperity, for they had now the countenance of the king of Babylon, and by this means they thought to do so.

2. To divide between them and their rulers. The devil knoweth what an advantage it is to religion to have the countenance of princes, and, on the other side, how jealous they are of their authority and prerogative; and therefore by his instruments seeketh to prejudice and prepossess them against it, and those that profess it in strictness and power. Thus 'Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words,' Amos vii. 10. He chargeth him with treason and open rebellion, that he withdrew subjects from their duty, and excited the people against his authority, and this by clancular insinuation, when Amos was not called or heard. Thus they pretend great friendship to authority, to sharpen the rage of princes against God's servants. So Ezra iv. 12, 'Be it known unto the king that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city,' &c. So Saul against David, as appears by his expostulation with him about it: 1 Sam. xxiv. 9, 'Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?' So Haman against the Jews: Esther iii. 8, 'Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad, and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are diverse from all people, neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them.' So in primitive times; thus did they take the Christians, who were most innocent, though they were more numerous; yet still they were faithful to their prince: *Bibamus pro salute imperatoris*; they would rather endure to die than venture upon it, for they did apprehend it as a heathen sacrifice. Thus whisperers make princes conceive an ill opinion of religious men.

3. To divide between them and God. The devil turneth every stone. Would you ever think malice should rise so high as to disengage God from the protection of his people, and to disaffect him against them? How can it be? Have Satan and his instruments a plot upon God himself? What else should be the meaning of all his temptations? But see Balaam's plot, Micah. vi. 5, 'O my people,

remember what Balak the king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered from Shittim unto Gilgal,' &c. Balak and Balaam are framing a project how to overcome the Israelites, and that can never be as long as God is with them; and how shall they do to get away God from them? Jehovah was not as a heathen god, to be called out by sacrifices and enchantments, as they had their charms and rites among the heathens to call out their tutelary gods from among the nations against whom they came to fight. Macrobius hath a chapter, *De Ritu evocandi Deos*. They were now to deal with the God of Israel, who would not be moved with such deceits and blandishments; therefore they will have a plot to disengage him from his people. It is insinuated, Num. xxiv. 14, 'Come now, and I will advertise thee what thou shalt do.' Moses doth not express the counsel given, because it was whispered secretly into Balak's ear; therefore you see the sense is imperfect in that place, and indeed there is a pause in the Hebrew, to show that something must be supplied. But what the plot was may be known by the effect, in the 25th of Numbers, and is in brief set forth, Rev. ii. 14, where it is said of Balaam, that 'he caused Balak to lay a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication.' This was the plot, to send some beautiful women of Midian to wander about the camp of Israel, to tempt their lusty youth and martial men first to uncleanness and then to idolatry, that so God might be provoked against them—a plot so full of refined malice, that it can hardly be paralleled. Thus the devil and his instruments play their part sufficiently, to divide God's people, to prejudice their rulers, yea, to disaffect God himself.

Secondly, Plots to discourage and suppress religion. So there are many ways which wicked men take. Who can name them all? I shall only instance in two policies of Julian the apostate, the most refined instrument the devil used either for wit or malice; two ways especially did he seek to undermine religion.

1. One was to forbid the use of schools to the Christians, and suppress human learning. To make a people irreligious, the way is to make them ignorant; discourage learning, and piety will not be long in fashion, not able long to maintain itself: in the dark men will adore any fancy. This was like Nahash his condition to Jabesh Gilead, 'Put out their right eye.' God's two famous instruments who wrote most both of the Old and New Testament, Paul and Moses, were both excellently skilled in secular learning.

2. Another was to put none to death for religion, but to oppress them with all manner of vexations and discouragements. To put them to death he apprehended to be glorious; but sometimes banished them towns. As Athanasius<sup>1</sup> deprived them of all offices civil and military, wasted them with burdensome levies and exactions: Let us make them poor, saith he scoffingly, for it is a hard matter for the rich to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The devil doth his work more cleverly and handsomely when Christians are not called out to the fire and gibbet, but are wasted by lingering inconveniences and loss of privileges.

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'Antoninus'?—ED.

Thirdly, Plots to introduce persecution.

1. Defamation. Infamy is the forerunner of more trouble, and the showers of slander are but presages of grievous storms of persecution. The devil is first a liar and then a murderer, John viii. 44. When the children of God are represented as criminal, they are more easily destroyed. It was a fashion in the primitive persecutions to invest Christians with a bear's skin, and then to bait them as bears. And it is a usual practice of Satan and his instruments to blast the repute of religious persons, to clothe them with the livery of reproach, and then prosecute them as offenders: Ps. v. 9, 'Their throat is an open sepulchre.' The slanders of the wicked are preparatives to death, as the sepulchre when opened is prepared to receive the dead carcase. Men first slander and then molest. The devil is afraid to meddle with unstained innocency. A good report is a great security against open violence.

2. To destroy the church, under the pretence of the church; as the beast in the Revelations pushed with the horns of the lamb, Rev. xiii. 11. It was a proverb, All evil began in the name of the Lord—*In nomine Domini incipit omne malum*. And it hath been a false pretended zeal for the church that hath of later years raised and fomented all or most of the persecutions of Christians.

3. To destroy Christians upon the pretence of civil quarrels and laws, and to disguise hatred against religion under a pretence of public peace; kill you, as well as cast you out of the synagogue. Dan. vi. 4, the Persian noblemen 'sought to find occasion against Daniel because of the kingdom, though they found none.'

4. To make way for errors and falsehoods; so many pits do the wicked dig to beguile unwary and unstable souls, sometimes by more than ordinary pretences of love, meekness, and sweetness. 'They come to you in sheep's clothing,' saith our Lord, 'but inwardly are ravening wolves,' Mat. vii. 15. Sheep's clothing, that is, all for love and kindness, and so steal away the hearts of the people, as Absalom by his submission and servile flattery. And then by debasing, opposing, and crying down a faithful ministry. Demosthenes' fable of the wolves agreeing with the sheep *in usu*<sup>1</sup> would send away their dogs. Now thus they do by questioning their calling, as the false teachers did Paul's; and we have been so long unministering one another, that all ministry is hated in the hearts of many an anti-ministerial spirit. Sometimes by decrying maintenance. The lamp is starved when not supplied with oil. Some, to gain credit and entrance, and to disgrace Paul and the true evangelic ministers, whose poverty needed a supply, will take no maintenance; therefore Paul saith, 2 Cor. xi. 12, 'That wherein they glory we might be as they;' but there is no end of raking in this puddle.

*Secondly*, Private persons. Cain against Abel, drew him into the field, disputed with him about God and providence and the world to come, Gen. iv. The princes of Darius against Daniel, Dan. vi. The kingdom was but newly subdued by the Medes: this would try the affection of his subjects; no request to be made to God or man for thirty days. The Medes and Persians were wont to ascribe divine honours to their kings, as Brissonius proveth. The report of this reverence would

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'in case they'!—ED.

be glorious. Religion was at stake; therefore Daniel would venture the lions' den. Judas's treason against Christ: Luke xxii. 3, 'The devil entered into Judas.' The Jews' laying in wait for Paul: Acts xxiii. 12-14, 'Certain Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, or oath of execration, that they would not eat or drink till they had killed Paul: and they were more than forty that had made this conspiracy.' And this they would do with the consent of the chief priests, as he was coming to the Sanhedrim. A parallel in the fifth of November. So Jezebel's plot against Naboth for his vineyard; makes use of God's name and worship to bring it about, 1 Kings xxi. 8-10. But I must stop, being carried beyond my first intention: plotted mischiefs are an ancient practice.

*Use of all.* How much are we obliged to God's providence, who doth not only defend us against open violence, but secret machinations! It is the Lord taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and disappointeth the counsels of wicked men against his people, Job v. 12. Many things are contrived against us in the dark that we know not and see not, but the eye of the Lord watcheth for us: Isa. viii. 10, 'Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought: speak the word, and it shall not stand, for God is with us.'

Second point. That these plots usually begin in pride; for David saith here, 'The proud have digged pits for me.' Therefore it is pride that puts men upon designs of mischief and ruin to others. Pride showeth itself in the envy of superiors, contention with equals, or the disdain of inferiors.

1. Take pride as it venteth itself by envy at any excellency, or supposed excellency, in others. Search the scriptures, and you will say this puts men upon plotting the mischief of their neighbours' religious eminency. Man cannot endure to be outstripped in religion; therefore men malign and hate what they will not imitate, and then seek to destroy and undermine God's people. It was Abel's goodness that made Cain plot against him, to draw him into the field that he might kill him, 1 John iii. 12. The power of godliness is an eyesore to those that would look no further than the form of it. Or it may be the men of the world do envy the godly should thrive by them. This made the presidents lay a snare and gin for Daniel. When the gospel is likely to get credit, 'the Jews, moved with envy,' seek to suppress it, Acts xvii. 5. Pride is loath to stoop, or to see opposites in any honour and request. The Pharisees conspired to take Christ: John xii. 10, 'Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? the whole world is gone after him.' They were galled to the heart to see such flocking and resorting to Christ after he had raised Lazarus from the dead. Some men will neither serve Christ themselves, nor endure that others should do it, therefore Christ must be taken out of the way. The plots of Sanballat and Tobias were their envy at the Jews.

2. As pride venteth itself by contention with equals; for only 'by pride cometh contention.' Thus the Jews conspired to kill Paul; they looked upon him as one that had cried down the customs of their nation. This made Absalom plot the death of Amnon, because of the quarrel he had with him, and the dishonour he had done his sister: he bids him to dinner, and plieth him with cups till he is merry, and then killeth him, 2 Sam. xiii. 22.

3. As it venteth itself by the disdain of underlings. Haman could not endure to see Mordecai in the king's gate, Esther v. 13, and therefore contriveth how to root him out and all his nation. Pride disdaineth the meanness of God's people, and that they should have any subsistence, and think they may oppress them freely, and root them out: Ps. cxxiii. 4, 'We are filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.' They scorn the people of God, and think they may do what they please with them without control.

Well, then, this informeth us how much we should look to things betimes. The wickedness of David's enemies began in pride, went on in malicious plotting, and then they stick at no iniquity. When once we are engaged in a course of sin, there is usually no stop. Pride in some sense is the original of all wickedness, but more especially of malicious dealing with the people of God: Ps. x. 2, 'The wicked, in the pride of his heart, doth persecute the poor.' The godly many times are in a mean condition when their adversaries are in power, and can easily oppress them as underlings; but men forget the great God, who is their defender, and whose work and business it is to cast down the proud: James iv. 6, *ἀντιπάσσειται*, he standeth in battle array. And proud they are certainly who use their power to oppression, and care not what terms they put upon them.

Third point. That God can, when he will, and usually doth, protect his people against the plots of the proud; for therefore David bringeth the cause before God.

First, That God can, when he will, protect his people against the fraud and violence of their enemies. There are two grounds of trust—his wisdom, and the vigilancy of his providence.

1. His wisdom. As we have God's power to trust in against their violence, so God's wisdom against their frauds and deceits: Job xii. 13, 'With him is wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding.' Wisdom implieth his accurate knowledge of things; counsel, his advised government of them; wisdom, his disposing and ordering things aright with respect to their ends. He hath understanding to find out all secrets, counsel to know fit means to bring his purposes to pass, and wisdom to order the means for attaining these ends.

Observe there, first, how wisdom and strength are there coupled; as in that text, so elsewhere: Job ix. 4, 'He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength.' As he hath wisdom to judge, so power to execute or effect all his counsels. So Job xxxvi. 5, 'Behold God is mighty in strength and wisdom.' There is no standing out against supreme wisdom and invincible power; both together make God the most dreadful enemy and the most desirable friend.

Observe, again, how God's wisdom is set forth by these three words, *understanding, counsel, wisdom*, to assure the hearts of the faithful that 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against' the church of God, Mat. xvi. 18. In the gates anciently was their strength, and there their magistrates and council sat. Now, they that believe that God is wise, of whom should they be afraid? Prov. xxi. 30, 'There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord.' There may be wisdom, counsel, and understanding in the enemies of the gospel;

and in the Lord there is wisdom and strength, counsel and understanding. Only against him there is the wisdom, counsel, and understanding of the creature; in him, of the creator. Surely the wisdom, counsel, and understanding of the creature can do nothing without him, nothing against him. Not without him, for it is dependent; whatever the creature hath it cometh from him; otherwise our understanding is but ignorance, our counsel rashness, our wisdom folly. Pharaoh thought to go wisely to work, Exod. i. 10; but that wisdom costs dear when it tends to suppress God's interest. Ahab, when God threatened to cut off his posterity, begets seventy sons, bestowed them in fenced cities, 2 Kings x. 1; but those seventy sons were slain. Herod thought to go wisely to work, to destroy him that was born king of the Jews in the cradle; but Christ was preserved for all that. The synagogue of Satan is hatching crafty counsels to destroy the spouse of Christ, but with what effect? The man of sin is consumed more and more. We are afraid of our subtle enemies, but are we in such straits as God knoweth not how to bring us out? They cannot outwit the Lord. Whatever is plotted in Rome or hell against us, God knoweth it, for he hath understanding; God counter-worketh it, for he hath counsel; therefore they will but play the fool, for he hath wisdom. He heareth every word they say, knoweth their secret juggling, is at work for those that depend upon him; therefore let us rest in God's wisdom, and not be disquieted with every rumour.

2. The care and vigilancy of his providence. It is emphatically expressed in two places: Heb. xiii. 5, 6, 'He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me;' and Ps. cxxi. 4, 'Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.' In both there is a negative gradation. His eyelids try the children of men; the Lord waketh for us all.

Secondly, That usually he doth protect his people against the plots of the proud, and bringeth the mischief they intend to others upon their own heads: Job xv. 35, 'They conceive mischief and bring forth vanity, and their belly prepareth deceit.' But to keep the notion of the text: Ps. vii. 15, 'He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made;' Ps. ix. 15, 16, 'The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared by the work of his own hand: they are sunk down into the pit they digged; in the net which they hid is their own feet taken.' So Ps. xxxv. 7, 8, 'For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul. Let destruction come upon him at unawares, and let his net that he hath hid catch himself: into that very destruction let him fall;' and Ps. x. 2, 'Let them be taken in the device they have imagined;' and Ps. lvii. 6, 'They have prepared a net for my step; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, in the midst whereof they are fallen themselves.' All these places show how usual it is that their devices do not succeed; yea, that the wicked cannot take a nearer course to ruin themselves than to seek the overthrow of God's church and people. All their machinations turn to their own loss, and the mischief they design to others falls constantly on themselves. As a stone thrown up or an arrow shot

up against heaven returneth upon the head of him that throweth it, their acts and attempts of hurting others are converted to their own ruin, and destruction seizeth upon them by that very means by which they thought to bring it upon other men. This God doth, partly as they are proud, as they despise God and his people: Ps. x. 4, 'The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.' They are so confident of all they design, that they will not so much as call upon God for a blessing: this is so firmly laid, that all things shall succeed. They will not seek after God through the pride of their countenance; or suppose they should pray, it is but as Balaam offering sacrifice to entice God to curse his own people. The Lord telleth us, Prov. xxi. 27, 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination: how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?' Partly because of God's care and respect to his people: 'The poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless,' Ps. x. 14. He trusts his all with God, who is the patron of the innocent and oppressed.

*Use 1.* To direct us to carry the cause to God, as David in the text: Ps. lxxxiii. 2-4, 'For lo, thine enemies make a tumult, and they that hate thee have lift up the head: they have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones: they have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.' You must make the Lord the party still against the wicked. So Ps. xxxvii. 12, 'The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth.' The wicked plotteth; but do the just countermin him? No; the Lord interposeth; he laugheth at him. It is a mighty support to the soul to oppose his justice to their wickedness, his omnipotency to their power, his wisdom to their craft, his love to their enmity. They are in God's hands, and cannot stir without him: as if one designed to poison me, but cannot do it without my father's consent. Wicked men are full of their boasts, but their brags and threats are but as the brags of a man on the scaffold, who is ready to be executed. Their day is coming.

2. When God doth so it must be acknowledged with thankfulness and praise; yea, though an old mercy, Micah vi. 5. The godly are preserved though there be pits digged for them. Surely such experiences ought much to engage his people's hearts to him, for it showeth how mindful he is of their safety and welfare. Blessed be God that yet we subsist, that their devices are disappointed, and their designs brought on them what they had projected against others.

Fourth point. That God's law forbiddeth all ungodly, treacherous designs, attempts, and actions.

As contrary to justice. To design mischief and treachery against the life of any is the guise of wicked men.

As contrary to sincerity and godly simplicity: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'For our rejoicing is this, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-wards.' Crafty and subtle dealings consenteth not with those that profess to direct their ways by the word of God.

As contrary to charity and mercy, which we owe to all men. How God hath guarded the life of the innocent by his precepts, and what a base perverse spirit it is to dig pits for them.

*Use.* Here is some plea for religion. It is not *feralis superstitio*. *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum?* It is not a false, unnatural, unkind superstition, when men, under pretence of it, commit such evils, digging pits, laying mines and barrels of gunpowder, that religion should persuade all this. The world thinks that religion is a sour superstition, that it makes men ill-natured. No; it is the peaceablest and meekest thing that can be. A false religion indeed efferates the mind, begets a bloody spirit: Jude 11, 'Gone in the way of Cain;' in the way of blood and murder. They that have either a false religion, or are false in the true religion, indeed they are ill-natured and possessed with a rough spirit, unfit for human society. The true religion, which God hath established in his law, is the meekest thing in all the world.

Fifth point. That the innocent should not be much troubled to be maligned and hated by them who condemn God's laws. Why?

For their wickedness, fraudulency, and cruelty is a certain prognostic of their ruin. The more their sins are aggravated, their judgment cometh the sooner. God's law is wronged, as well as our interest endangered.

It is a great ease to the conscience of the godly that they dig pits for us without a cause, Ps. xxxv. 7. The most godly and innocent may have pits digged for them. It encourageth us in our addresses to God, that we have no enemies but those who are enemies to God also and his ways; and the most wicked men are most violent against God's people. Who was it first raged against the Christians but Nero? And what a beast was Nero! That must needs be some great good that was condemned by Nero, but it was an honour and credit to religion to have such an enemy as Nero: Ps. v. 10, 'Let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions, for they have rebelled against thee.' It is some argument of confidence that their ruin is coming.

*Use.* What use shall God's people make of the whole for themselves?

1. Never to engage in any design but what will suit with God's word, and you may commend to God in prayer. Do not dig pits which are not after God's law. Examine it according to rule. Never break a law for safety, nor for the best ends in the world dispense with your duty to God or man. It is horrible distrust of God's promises to venture upon the breach of his precepts for our pretended safety. Take heed of doing anything or carrying any plot against God's law, unless you would be like the enemies of the gospel.

2. Walk with greater simplicity, without that guile and double-dealing and serpentine wisdom that is so proper to wicked men. He that walketh uprightly walketh safely. Protection holds good for the road and not for byways, 2 Cor. i. 12. The proud are those that dig pits; the character of those that shall have pardon for their sins is this, 'In whose spirit there is no guile.' A guileful spirit ill suits with the gospel and the grace of God.

3. Take heed of carnal affections. Pride, envy, contempt of others, we know not how far these lusts may transport us, to what horrid,

unnatural designs. When once the devil hath a man upon the hip, when engaged in an evil design, it is hard to stop; pride then digging pits, and then casting off God's law; and then he never cares whether to please or displease, honour or dishonour God, is not troubled with such kind of thoughts.

4. Take heed how you engage against God's people, or dig pits for them that fear the Lord. God's interest usually goeth along with them: Isa. viii. 9, 10, 'Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken to pieces: take counsel together, and it shall come to nought.' As the captain's servant said, 'Take heed what ye do, for this man is a Roman.' So these men are children of God, he is their patron and protector; God is interested in their protection; they are little ones, but they have a great God, Mat. xviii. 10. Therefore take heed of having any interest opposite to the strict people of God, for this is but to ruin yourselves.

### SERMON XCIII.

*For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.*—VER. 89.

THESE words are usually rendered as making but one proposition; but the accent *almah* sheweth there are two branches, the one asserting the eternity of God, the other the constancy and permanency of his word. Thus—(1.) 'For ever art thou, O Lord;' (2.) 'Thy word is settled in the heavens.' So the Syriac version readeth it; and Geierus, and after him others, prove and approve this reading. And so this verse and the following do the better correspond one with another, if we observe beginning and ending, as 'Thou art for ever, O Lord,' and 'Thy faithfulness unto all generations,' which are exactly parallel. And then the last clauses, 'Thy word is settled in the heavens,' 'Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.' And implieth, as God is eternal, so is his word, and hath an emblem and fit representation both in heaven and in earth: in heaven, in the constant motion of the heavenly bodies; in earth, in the consistency and permanency thereof; that as his word doth stand fast in heaven, so doth his faithfulness on earth, where the afflictions of the godly seem to contradict it.

First, Of the first clause, 'Thou art for ever, O Jehovah.'

1. That Jehovah is the one, only, eternal, and everlasting God. What eternity is passeth our skill exactly to define. As we understand it, it is the duration of a being that is without beginning or end. Duration is a continual tract of being; and eternal duration implieth an immutable and unterminable abode in being. So it is here.

[1.] It is an infinite, unterminable duration, without beginning or ending: Ps. xc. 2, 'From everlasting to everlasting thou art God.' God never was nothing, never shall be nothing. All the generations past were, but now are not. We heretofore were not, but now are. God is the beginning and end of all things, yet himself without beginning or end. He had an infinite, incomprehensible being before