

**SERMONS**

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

BY

**THE LATE HENRY KOLLOCK, D. D.**

WITH

**A MEMOIR**

OF

**THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.**

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IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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# SERMONS.

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## SERMON XXX.



LIFE OF DAVID.

No. I.

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I SAMUEL XVI. TO THE END OF THE BOOK.

WHAT various sensations are excited while perusing the history of David! At one time our hearts glow with admiration of his virtues; at another they are pained by his deep and disgraceful fall! Here we listen to his harp, while in notes almost angelic he celebrates the perfections of Jehovah, expresses the delights of communion with him, or pours forth the strains of holy love and unshaken trust. There we mark the bitter tears of anguish, and the agonized accents of contrition, while he reviews his aggravated crimes, and humbled in the dust, implores forgiveness! Now we behold the good providence and power of the Almighty encircling him in his perils, and protecting him during his persecutions. Then



we hear the annunciations of pardon from the Most Merciful to the penitent offender. It will not then be uninteresting nor useless to us, briefly to review his history. We shall find much to praise and imitate, but much also to blame.

Let me, however, previously remark, that the manner in which the lives of eminent men are related in the Scriptures, affords a strong proof of the sincerity of the sacred writers. The simplicity of truth every where shines. There is no attempt to extol their favourites. Their failings are neither concealed nor extenuated, but presented with as much impartiality as are their virtues. How different is this from the manner of those historians who write merely to promote a particular cause, or to eulogize a favourite hero.

The family of Saul, in consequence of his violation of the commands of God, had been rejected from the succession to the throne. Though Samuel, faithful to the orders of the Lord, had announced these tidings to Saul, yet he still mourned for a king whom he had once so tenderly loved, and interceded with Jehovah in his behalf. But his prayers were not seconded by the penitence of Saul; and God, to show that his sentence was irrevocable, ordered the prophet to consecrate the future king by the sacred anointing oil. In compliance with this revelation, Samuel departed for Bethlehem, and there anointed the youngest of the sons of Jesse, who had hitherto lived in obscurity and retirement, following the peaceful occupation of a shepherd. There appeared few prognostics of his future eminence: but the Lord can, from any situation, raise up and qualify instruments for the work he designs to perform. He can bring a David from the sheep-cote, and fit him

for the command of armies and the administration of government; an Amos from the herds of Tekoa, that he may, with all the holy fervour of prophetic inspiration, declare the laws and the counsels of heaven; a Peter and a John from the fishing net, that they may hold up the light of revelation, and carry the consolations of the Gospel to millions ready to perish. Despise not then those who are in a lowly situation in life: you know not for what great purposes they may yet be destined by the Lord. David never forgot the obscure condition whence he was elevated. In his psalms and his prayers, we find him perpetually recalling it with thankful admiration. Such will be our gratitude if it is sincere. We shall not forget the past mercies of God; and, amidst the decrepitude of age, shall remember the protections of our childhood, and the mercies of our youth. Though the little that we know of Jesse leads us to suppose that he was pious, yet the holy inclinations of David were chiefly cherished by his mother. We judge so from his frequent reference to her in the Psalms: "Save thy servant and the *son of thine handmaid.*"

This designation of David to be the successor of Saul, took place when he was between fifteen and twenty years of age, and was probably known for some time only to his immediate family and friends. Unreluctant by this distinction, he cheerfully returned to his former occupation of a shepherd, waiting till God should conduct him, in the course of his providence, to the predicted elevation. In the fields of Bethlehem, in the solitude of the night, he sang many of those sacred hymns which still animate the devotions of Christians; he "considered the heavens, the work of God's hands, the moon and the stars

which he has ordained ;” and wondered that this Infinite Being would be “mindful of him and visit him.” Smitten by a prophetic ray, he looked down the long current of years, and beheld Messiah, his son and yet his Lord, whose advent was celebrated by a choir of angels in the same fields, and perhaps in the very spot where he then was.

He was soon, however, called from these peaceful scenes to the court. Saul being seized with melancholy, was advised to send for David ; who, by the melody of his harp, accompanied probably by some of those sacred hymns which still touch the soul, relieved the distraction of this monarch’s mind, and soothed the despondency of his heart. On the recovery of Saul, he was dismissed again to his father’s house, with marks of the esteem and regard of Saul.

An opportunity soon occurred of proving, that the Spirit which had rested on him at his anointing, had endowed him with the qualifications requisite for the high office that he was to fill. The Philistines had encamped against Israel at Ephesdammin. Saul also had collected his army to oppose them. The hosts were stationed on two opposite mountains, but had not yet engaged. One only person entered the intervening valley of Elah, and defied the hosts and blasphemed the God of Israel. This was Goliath, of Gath, a giant of the race of Anakim, formidable for his size, his strength, and his arms. For forty days he had repeated his defiance morning and evening ; and of the many champions of Israel, who had never before shown fear, there was not one who did not shrink from the combat with him. At this period David arrived at the camp, with a message from their father to his three elder brethren. He heard the vaunts of Goliath ; his heart kindled with a holy

indignation at his blasphemies and reproaches against the God of Israel, and, strong in faith and courage, he resolved to meet this foe. In vain were the sarcastic and envious sneers of his brother, who accused him of being instigated only by pride. He replied to these insinuations with meekness, and remained fixed in his purpose, for his heroism was founded on religion. Saul, hearing of his desire, sent for him; and, while he praised his courage, dissuaded him from a combat which his age, his weakness, and his inexperience in arms, appeared to render rash. David replied by recounting past interpositions of Providence in his favour, and by expressing his confidence that the same heavenly succour would be afforded to him. The king, moved by the energy of his discourse and the strength of his faith, exclaimed, "Go, and the Lord be with thee." Rejecting the choice armour of Saul, to which he was unaccustomed, and by which he was incommoded, he advanced into the field with only his shepherd's staff, his sling, and five smooth stones. The smallness of his size excited the contempt of the giant, and the nature of his arms provoked his indignation. He expressed these mingled emotions when he exclaimed, "Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? and he cursed David by his gods. And he said, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field." But David, in the confidence of faith and the coolness of true courage, replied, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into my hands; and I will smite thee, and take thine head

from thee ; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and the wild beasts of the earth ; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel." His declaration was verified. With a sling and a stone, he who had excited so much terror was prostrated on the earth, and his head severed from his body by his own sword. The Philistines, terrified by the death of their champion, and the shouts of joy from the enemy's camp, immediately fled, and were pursued by the Israelites. The head of Goliath, after being presented to Saul, was preserved at Jerusalem ; and his sword was deposited in the tabernacle of Nob, as an acknowledgment of the aid of God.

After perusing this history, shall we tremble at any dangers in which we may expect the presence of the Lord ? David's God still lives, and will surely aid us if we have David's faith. Especially in that conflict, in which all believers must engage, in our combat with that enemy stronger than Goliath, who challenges the armies of the living God, let us avoid " an evil heart of unbelief ;" let us exercise a true faith in the promises of the Redeemer and the everlasting covenant, and we shall assuredly be successful.

David was now honoured by the soldiers, respected at the court, and admired by the people : but Saul soon viewed him with jealousy and rage. After the victory over the Philistines, the women of Israel had sung, in their public celebrations of this event, " Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." The harp of David had not been more successful in composing the monarch's mind, than this thankful acknowledgment was in rousing his fury. He thought that the surest mode of calming

his inquietudes, was to deprive of life him who had caused them. He, therefore, while David was playing before him, endeavoured twice to pierce him with his spear: but Providence interposed in behalf of the son of Jesse. The fury of the king was increased by disappointment; and we shall henceforth see him nourishing the most irreconcilable hatred, and exercising the blackest ingratitude, to David; and David displaying to him constant moderation and magnanimity.

But David was comforted under the persecutions of Saul by the attachment of his son. Jonathan, possessed of high virtue and courage, and a tender heart, could not but properly appreciate these qualities in another; and therefore, to use the strong expression of Scripture, "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." It was a friendship that was proved by exposing his own safety for the preservation of David, that was not impaired by adversity, that endured till the close of life. That it was mutual, is shown by the pathetic lamentations of David when Jonathan fell at Gilboa, and by his affectionate conduct to his surviving children.

Though few such friends are to be found, yet there is one more powerful, more tender, more durable; one "who sticketh closer than a brother;" who is ready to indulge the most generous affection to you. This is the blessed Redeemer, who hath declared respecting his disciples, "Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Secure his friendship, and adversity will lose its bitterness, and the grave its victory. Death will bear your soul to his embraces; and after leaving your body for a

short time in the dust, he will say to the angels who surround his throne, as he did to the disciples during his incarnation, "Come, let us descend; our friend sleepeth: I go that I may awake him."

Merab, the eldest daughter of Saul, had been promised to David as the reward of his victory over Goliath: but when the marriage was about to be concluded, she was given to a man of Abel-mehola. The king probably hoped, that so atrocious an injury would urge the object of his hatred to some act of violence that might be punished with death. Disappointed in this expectation, David was informed that Michal, the younger daughter, should be given him, if in an expedition against the enemy he should slay one hundred of them. Saul again had the mortification of seeing David return victorious, after destroying two hundred Philistines, instead of hearing of his death.

Saul, no longer able to refuse his daughter, endeavoured, by the instrumentality of Jonathan and Michal, to shorten the life of David. But these were too generous, and too tenderly attached to David, to assist the murderous designs of their father.

We have not time minutely to relate all the deliverances of David. He fled to the venerable Samuel at Naioth, a seminary of the prophets, hoping that in the exercises of religion he might enjoy peace. He was pursued thither by the unabated malice of Saul; but two bands sent to apprehend him, and Saul himself, were prevented from executing their designs by a miraculous impression on their minds. In what numberless modes can God deliver his children!

He secretly returned to his beloved Jonathan, and found consolation in his tried friendship: but con-

vinced of the inveteracy of his father's hatred, was obliged to part with him. How often has God given us similar relief in our sorrows! How often has he raised up friends and comforters in our trials, and dried our tears by the kindness of those whose hearts he has turned towards us.

Fleeing again to the high-priest Abimelech at Nob, he partook of the shew-bread, which in ordinary occasions could be eaten by the priests only, but for partaking of which he is excused by the Saviour himself; (Matt. xii. 3.) and received the sword of Goliath, that undoubted proof of the merciful protection of his God. The view of it doubtless often strengthened his faith and assured him of deliverance. Our own comfort, as well as gratitude, require us to preserve memorials of the divine goodness to us.

Driven from the territories of Saul, he sought refuge in the court of Achish, king of Gath, where he was preserved either by pretended madness or a real epilepsy.

“Hunted like a partridge upon the mountains,” the poor exile is found now in the cave of Adullam, where he is joined by his relatives, and by four hundred men of courage, but of desperate fortunes, whom he uses however only to defend himself, and to serve for the security of the neighbouring inhabitants; now in the court of Moab, whither he carries his aged parents whence their ancestor Ruth had come, and commits to the king till he knows “what God will do for him.” Returning to Judea by the advice of Gad, he shows that in the midst of his own distresses he can feel for the sufferings of others, and delivers Keilah from the assaults of its enemies. When the inhabitants of this city had basely and ungratefully



resolved to deliver him up to Saul, he fled again to the wilderness of Ziph; here he for the last time had an interview with Jonathan, and by holy and affectionate conversation his faith was confirmed and his heart cheered. They met no more in this world; but their friendship was founded on piety and was imperishable. They have been re-united in glory; and in the transports of re-union David forgot the sorrow with which he poured forth his lamentations for the fall of Jonathan on Gilboa. "If the converse of one friend can at one interview occasion comfort and strength to our hearts, what may not be expected from the continual supports, and daily visits, and powerful love, of the sinner's Saviour, the believer's covenanted friend? And what will heaven be, where perfect, universal friendship reigns, without interruption, separation, or alloy? Let us then continually seek the renewed ratification of the covenant of grace, and cultivate the friendship of the Lord and his people." (*Scott.*) From Ziph, David fled to Maon and Engeddi; and was pursued into mountains, caves, and deserts. Every day his life was threatened; every day he experienced anew the watchful care of providence.

Having at last obtained a short respite at Ziklag, he was on the commencement of a new war between the Philistines and Israelites; he was about to be reduced to the painful necessity of choosing between the defence of his benefactors or countrymen. Saved in this extremity from either painful alternative, he returned to Ziklag, whence he had been a short time absent. He found that it had been attacked by the Amalekites, the inhabitants and his family taken prisoners, and the place burnt. In addition to this, he was blamed as the cause of this calamity, and the

enraged people thought of putting him to death. Never was a more melancholy situation. Exiled from his country, pursued by this king, suspected of perfidy by those who had received him in his exile, torn from those to whom he was united by the tenderest bonds, and finding in the place of his refuge executioners instead of comforters; no wonder that he and his companions in arms melted into tears. But tears become not a hero who had so often been delivered; they were soon dried; and even in this extremity David “encouraged himself in the Lord his God.” Having sought his direction and aid, he immediately pursued the enemy, and having overtaken them, obtained a complete victory, and recovered the spoil and the prisoners.

Here ended the persecutions of David by Saul; for about the time of this victory, a decisive battle was fought between the Philistines and Israelites, in which Saul and Jonathan were slain. Though their death opened the way for him to the throne, yet instead of rejoicing, he wept for them, and commemorated their memory in that affecting elegy which he then wrote.

In reviewing the conduct of David during these trials, we find much to admire. Of the sentiments of his heart and the exercises of his mind we can judge from his psalms, many of which were written during this period. We find them breathing a holy trust in God in the most imminent dangers, a firm belief in his providence in the darkest hours, and an assurance that his promises would all be accomplished. After deliverances, the song of praise to God is always raised; and in afflictions he fled to the Lord as his “refuge and high tower.” If we are compelled to blame him because in his perplexities

he dissembled with Abimelech; if after so many sufferings, his faith failed him for a moment, and he cried, "I shall now one day perish by the hand of Saul;" yet let us acknowledge that his general deportment evinced ardent piety, meek resignation, a firm trust in the everlasting covenant, fervent devotion, and often a holy joy which elevated him above all outward woes.

Neither was his conduct to his fellow-men less remarkable. How many instances of forbearance and forgiveness did he display! If when wandering a poor distressed exile, in want of the necessaries of life, he for a moment forgot his meekness at the cruel and insulting answer of Nabal, to whom he had sent for relief after protecting his possessions, yet he soon returned to his usual temper, and blessed the providential interposition and restraining grace of God, which prevented him from executing his rash designs. Twice was the life of Saul in his power; and endeavouring to melt down the spirit of his adversary, twice he not only himself refused to lift his hand against him, but restrained his followers who desired to deprive this persecutor of his life. So magnanimous and generous was this conduct, that for a time it affected even Saul, who cried, "I have sinned, thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil." Revengeful and implacable men, admire and imitate this example!

David was delivered from his trials, and in the history of them we every where see the divine power, love, and faithfulness. In reviewing your own lives, do you not see these same perfections almost visibly displayed? Acknowledge then the goodness of God; instead of ascribing your preservations to fortune or

chance, words without a meaning, say with David, "It is the Lord's doing, and it is wondrous in our eyes." Trust in him for the future; learn from the example of the psalmist, that if the Lord be for us, we need not fear whatever foes may be against us.

To the sufferings of David succeeded the crown; and thy afflictions, poor believer, shall be followed by the crown of glory. Bear patiently then thy calamities; a few more trials, a few more tears, a few more combats with thy spiritual enemies, and thy triumph shall commence; press forward, animated by the voice of thy Saviour calling to thee from heaven, "To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne." (Rev. iii. 22.)

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## SERMON XXXI.



LIFE OF DAVID,

No. II.



2 SAMUEL i—x.

IN a lecture delivered to you a few weeks since, we accompanied David from his birth till the period when the death of Saul opened the way for him to

the throne of Israel. We found, in his general deportment during this time, ardent piety, meek resignation, a firm trust in the everlasting covenant, heroic courage, fervent devotion, and often a holy joy which elevated him above all outward woes. We shall perceive the same traits in that portion of his life which we are now to review.

The battle of Gilboa, so fatal to Saul and his sons, was probably fought on the same day on which David and his veterans avenged themselves on those who had spoiled and destroyed Ziklag. Ah! what various scenes occur in the same moment on the earth! Here a kingdom is in mourning, and there one elevated with joy: here a family is in tears, and there one full of rapture. The third day after this engagement, a young Amalekite met David with the royal insignia of Saul, and declared that, being on the field of battle, and seeing Saul wounded, he had, at his request, stood upon him and slain him. This report was false, since the story told by the Amalekite is inconsistent with itself, and utterly irreconcilable with the account of the death of Saul that is given by the sacred writer. It was an invention of the Amalekite to secure the friendship of David. Ah! little did this deceiver know the heart of him whom he addressed! He met with the reward which he deserved, instead of that which he expected. David had no opportunity of discovering the falsehood of the relation, and, instead of recompensing the Amalekite, pronounced upon him this sentence, which was immediately executed: "Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the Lord's anointed." I am surprised that David has been censured for this act. The Amalekite certainly merited death, because he

was authorized by no law, human or divine, to lay violent hands upon Saul. Even if this king of Israel had wished to die, according to the representation of the Amalekite, it is no less murder to deprive of life one who desires to die, than one who desires to live; since it equally infringes the law of the Supreme Legislator, "Thou shalt not kill." If he deserved death, David had authority to inflict it, since when Saul had expired, he was in reality the king of Israel, having been anointed to that office by the express command of the Lord. Of his motives in ordering this punishment, we cannot hesitate, after considering both his former and subsequent conduct. What care did he always use to preserve a life, that interest and ambition would have made him desirous to extinguish! Remember his conduct in the cave of Engeddi, and at the time when he penetrated not only into the camp, but even to the pillow, of the sleeping Saul, and when he repulsed with indignation the proposal of Abishai to deprive this their enemy of life. Such scenes are a sufficient proof of the purity of his motives on this occasion. This purity was also shown by his behaviour to the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead. Saul had delivered them from the oppression of the cruel Nahash. They remembered this kindness, and testified their gratitude to their benefactor after his death. Hearing that his body and those of his sons were suspended upon the walls of Bethshan, they entered this city, bore these corpses away, and, after fasting seven days, interred these corpses with a solemnity and pomp suitable to their former rank. So generous an action struck the heart of David. He sent deputies to them, assured them that God would reward them, and that, as far as his power could extend, he himself would requite

them. Need we add to these instances the pathetic elegy which he poured forth upon the death of Saul and Jonathan, the first and one of the tenderest productions of this kind to be found in the monuments of antiquity? Who, then, but must be constrained to admire the nobleness, the disinterestedness of his soul?

David was in reality king, immediately upon the death of Saul; but he will take no steps to seat himself upon the throne, without the express orders of God. He considers the Lord as the pillar of fire and cloud, which is to direct every movement that he makes. He consults God, therefore, by Urim and Thummim, and is directed to go to Hebron, in the centre of the tribe of Judah. He departs, therefore, carrying with him his family, and those brave warriors who had followed him into exile, and had endured so many perils with him. They had participated in his sorrows—they shall also participate in his prosperity. Though they had lately been disposed to stone him at Ziklag, yet he remembers only their wonted attachment. “Thus,” says Bishop Hall, “doth our heavenly Leader, whom David prefigured, take us to reign with him, who have suffered with him. Passing by our manifold infirmities as though they had not been, he removeth us from the land of our banishment, and the ashes of our forlorn Ziklag, to the Hebron of our peace and glory: the expectation of this day must, as it did for David’s soldiers, dissipate all our sorrows.”

Entering into Hebron, amidst the acclamations of the inhabitants, David was acknowledged king, and was a second time anointed, his previous anointing by Samuel having been private.

The sentiments of David on his advancement are represented in those psalms of praise which he composed on this occasion. Instead of a proud, imperious spirit, and an ungrateful forgetfulness of providence, he, in the spirit of meekness, and with the fervour of devotion, retraces the divine goodness, acknowledges his own unworthiness, and implores grace from on high to enable him to discharge the weighty and important duties that had devolved on him.

Whether the other tribes were offended because they were not invited to his solemn anointing, or whether the family of Saul had still more partisans than David, he was for some time acknowledged only by the tribe of Judah. Abner, a relative and a general of Saul, declared himself in favour of Ishbosheth. He led him to the camp, declared him king, and caused him to be acknowledged by the army and the other tribes. But the purposes and promises of God can never be defeated. The son of Jesse shall obtain that throne which the Lord has declared he shall occupy. For two years, David acted only on the defensive; but at the expiration of this period, the pride and ambition of Abner produced an open war. "And there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker." Abner, offended at last by the reproaches of Ishbosheth, declared that he would abandon him, and give his influence to the true successor to the crown and throne of Israel. The execution of this design was prevented by his treacherous assassination by Joab and his brother Abishai, the two principal officers of David. He was struck with horror at this transaction; but such was the unsettled state of the kingdom, and such the influence



of these commanders over the soldiery, that he could not put the murderers to death. He cried, "I am this day weak, though anointed king; the sons of Zeruiah be too strong for me." He declared his own innocence; he deprecated the divine vengeance from himself and his country; he foretold the judgments that would fall upon the guilty; he commanded Joab to attend the burial of him whom he had assassinated, and he himself followed the bier, overwhelmed with grief. Do we here imitate David? Do we deeply lament those sins, the commission of which we cannot hinder? Do we mourn for the transgressions of others, as well as those of ourselves? We must do so, except we are entirely indifferent to the glory of God.

Ishbosheth, shortly after, was deprived of life. Baanah and Rechab, two of his officers, indulging the same error with the Amalekite, supposed that they would gratify David by delivering him, in any manner, of his only rival. They therefore traitorously murdered him, and bore his head to David, representing their crime as an act of justice which God had inspired. They said, "Behold the head of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, thine enemy, which sought thy life; the Lord hath avenged my lord the king this day of Saul and of his house."

Cæsar was filled with grief when he beheld the head of Pompey, the most formidable rival that he had ever had in the career of glory: he shed tears when he beheld it, and punished with death those who had destroyed this illustrious man. Was David less magnanimous or disinterested than Cæsar? He viewed with horror the crime of these men; he wished to gain no advantage by the deceit or cruelty of others; he could weep at the unjust oppression

even of an enemy. As their guilt was greater than that of the Amalekite, he sentenced them immediately to a death still more painful and infamous than his.

After the death of Ishbosheth, there was but one sentiment among the Israelites with regard to David. They had seen his wisdom, his courage, and integrity; they found it vain to contend against a prince of God's appointment, they therefore unanimously submitted to him; the deputed elders, in the name of the whole kingdom, a third time anointed him; the armies crowded to his standard, and the whole nation testified their joy. Thus, seven and a half years from the death of Saul, more than fifteen from his first anointing by Samuel, and at the age of thirty, he was in full possession of the sovereignty.

Christian, the fulfilment of the promises made to you may be delayed; yet do not, therefore, murmur or despond. Exercise faith and patience; use no undue means to promote their accomplishment; and they shall in God's best time be fulfilled to you, as they were to David.

From this time till his crimes drew down upon him the judgments of God, nothing can be more splendid than his reign. His dominions were enlarged on every side, and the God of hosts supported him in every battle. I cannot describe, in detail, all his victories; I can give little more than a list of them. The *Jebusites* first felt the power of his arms: inhabiting the mountains, they occupied, among others, part of that on which Jerusalem was built. Though they considered their situation as so impregnable that they bitterly derided the advancing troops of David, yet they were soon subdued; the seat of government was fixed at Jerusalem, and a royal palace there built. The Philistines, envious of

his advancement, commenced hostilities against him. By the immediate direction of God, he marched against them, and obtained two splendid victories over them. The Moabites furnished new triumphs to this hero. If his conduct, after their subjugation, should appear cruel to us, let us recollect that the usages of war were much more sanguinary in ancient than in modern times. Hadadezer, king of Zobab, who had possessed himself of the territories which God had granted to Israel in the promise made to Abraham, and renewed to Joshua, next fell beneath his arms. The Syrians of Damascus, coming to the assistance of the king of Zobab, participated in his defeat. The death of eighteen thousand Edomites secured a victory over them. Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, having died, David sent messengers to condole with his son. Instead of receiving them with kindness, Hanun treated them in a manner, which, according to the customs of the orientals, is the proof of the greatest contempt, and the punishment of the most atrocious crimes. Supposing that this conduct would be resented, he prepared for war, and fearing to meet this victorious hero alone, he hired thirty-two thousand men from the neighbouring kingdoms. Let us merely observe, in passing, that this is the first instance in history of the employment of mercenary troops. But in vain was this immense preparation. The allies were soon broken; and the Ammonites, seeing themselves thus abandoned, joined them in the flight. The allies, fearful that David would punish them by attacking them in their own cities, raised a numerous army. David instantly crossed the Jordan, advanced to them, and obtained so splendid a victory, that they all sued for peace.

And why was it, my brethren, that David was so uniformly successful? Because in the name of the Lord he lifted up his banner, and Jehovah, God of hosts, fought for him. Would we desire success in the conflict in which we are engaged? Let us imitate his example, and secure the friendship of the Almighty; then "no weapon formed against us shall prosper;" then "one of us shall chase a thousand, and ten put ten thousand to flight." Let us with faith look up to the Disposer of events, and say, "Through God we shall do valiantly; for it is he that shall tread down our enemies."

Yes! though fervour of devotion is too rarely combined with military prowess, yet David was still more illustrious by his piety than by his warlike achievements. These perpetual combats never made him forget his duties. These successive victories never elated his heart with pride, nor made him neglect the Author of his prosperity. Of this we have abundant proofs in many of his psalms, which are monuments of gratitude for these victories.

It was also in the midst of these conquests that he formed the design of bringing the ark to Jerusalem. It had long lain in obscurity and neglect at Kirjath-jearim. David prepared to carry this august symbol of the divine presence, with pomp and solemnity, to the holy city. He and the chosen men of his army attended with demonstrations of reverence and joy. But the sacred ceremony was soon suspended, and a gloom cast upon the assembly. God had expressly declared that the ark should be carried from place to place only upon the shoulders of the sons of Kohath; and none but the priests were permitted to touch it. The first of these laws was violated by the

manner of the transportation of the ark; the second by Uzzah, when, through presumption or unbelief, he put forth his hand to save it from falling. He expiated his crime by a sudden death.

Ah! how forcibly does this circumstance admonish us to conform to the whole divine will, and warn us against daring to trifle with the smallest commands of God!

David was filled with apprehension. He cried, "How shall the ark of the Lord come unto me?" He experienced nearly the same emotions as did Peter, when, on the display of the Saviour's miraculous power, he fell down at his feet, and exclaimed, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." But Obededom, a pious Levite, had more correct sentiments. He was not afraid to receive the ark into his house, provided he did it with holy and reverential dispositions of soul. Experience proved the correctness of his opinion, for the ark brought with it the benedictions of God.

David, observing this, renewed his design of transporting it to Jerusalem. But he now acted with more circumspection. He strictly observed the requisitions of the law; he prepared psalms of praise and thanksgiving to the God of Israel; he commenced with acts of holy worship; laying aside his royal robes, and dressed in a simple ephod, he testified, in every manner, the fervour of his zeal, his love, and his joy. When the ark of God was fixed in its place, new oblations were made; and as the prophet as well as prince of his people, he made intercession for his subjects, and pronounced benedictions upon them. He on this occasion also regulated the divine worship for the future, and made provision for the public ordinances of religion, both

at Jerusalem and Gibeon, where the ancient tabernacle still stood. Happy those, who thus delight, with David, in the worship and ordinances of God!

After these public exercises, David, says the historian, "returned to bless his house;" to advise, instruct, pray with and for his family. David, then, had his domestic altar; and, amidst all the cares of royalty, still found leisure for family worship. Does not his example reprove many, who, while they acknowledge the propriety of this duty, plead want of time as an excuse for the neglect of it?

The most holy actions may be misrepresented. Michal, the wife of David, instead of participating in his joy, reproached him with acting inconsistently with the royal dignity, and with degrading himself in the eyes of his subjects. David, however, was unmoved by these reproaches, and declared, that if to be zealous for God were to be vile, he would be yet more vile.

But while he rejoiced in having the ark of the covenant so near his palace, he was dissatisfied that no proper house was built for God, and therefore formed the design of erecting a magnificent temple. Though the design was pious, yet it was prohibited by God, who informed him by his prophet that it was not rejected in displeasure, that other services were required of him, and that the temple should be reared by his son and successor. The most gracious promises were added, and his faith directed to that exalted Personage with whom the everlasting covenant is established, who was to sit upon the throne of David, and of whose kingdom there should be no end. David submits without murmuring to the frustration of his pious design, and is not displeased that another should be called, instead of him, to this

honourable work; but overwhelmed with the kindness that God had displayed, and the promises he had made to him, cries out, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?"

With this delightful union of fervour, of gratitude, and of humility, let us recollect the past mercies of our Father, and reflect on his promises for the future.

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## SERMON XXXII.



LIFE OF DAVID.

No. III.



2 SAMUEL xi. xii.

IN the two lectures which have been delivered to you on the life of David, we have seen much to admire and to imitate. We beheld with delight his ardent piety, his warm devotion, and his heroic courage. But, Lord, what is man when left to himself, and unsupported by divine grace! This king of Israel is next presented to us indulging in the blackest crimes. Willingly would I omit this part of his life, but it is written for our instruction; and humbling as it is, it will teach us many useful lessons.

Besides, it is necessary to guard against the abuse of this history, which has so often been employed by the wicked to harden themselves in iniquity, to strengthen their objections against religion, and to quiet their consciences while living in sin.

After so many splendid victories achieved by David, after such frequent triumphs over his enemies, nothing remained but the subjugation of those passions that are excited by prosperity and wealth: but these were enemies more difficult to subdue than the Philistines and the other powerful nations whom this valiant warrior had vanquished. "He that ruleth his spirit is stronger than he that taketh a city," is the declaration of the wise man; it is confirmed by David, who, invincible by the arms of so many enemies who had conspired against his crown and his life, yielded to the seductions of criminal pleasure, and was led by it from crime to crime.

"With what unwillingness, with what fear," says Bishop Hall, "do I look upon his miscarriage! O, holy prophet, who can promise himself always to stand when he sees thee fallen and maimed with the fall! Who can assure himself of an immunity from the greatest sins, when he sees thee offending so heinously! Let profane eyes behold thee as a pattern, as an excuse for sinning: I shall never look upon thee but through tears, as a woful spectacle of human infirmity."

David was smitten with the charms of Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, a brave and generous soldier, who was at that time fighting the battles of his country, and engaged at the siege of Rabbah. Contrary to the laws of God, to every sentiment of honour, and every dictate of generosity, he led her to violate her nuptial engagements. Disappointed in his shameful



and wicked plans to conceal this illicit intercourse, he deliberately plotted the life of Uriah, and ordered Joab to place him in the fore-front of the battle, and then retire from him and suffer him to be slain. The disgraceful and criminal plan was executed. The brave Uriah fell; and Bathsheba after a short time became the wife of David.

What shall we say to this conduct? Shall we with some well-intentioned but injudicious commentators extenuate the crimes of David? No; he himself, when his eyes were opened to behold the depth of the abyss into which he was fallen, would not attempt to diminish the horror of his transgressions. He was guilty of crimes than which none more enormous are to be found in the black list of sins. The murder was premeditated, deliberate, concerted; he immolates a faithful subject who was exposing his life for the service of his country and the glory of his king, and who was incapable of cowardice, or even the appearance of effeminacy. With Uriah he sacrifices the lives of those men who formed the party which he commanded. And all this was aggravated by his knowledge of the divine law; by the multiplied mercies which he had received from God; by the eminent station which he occupied; and by the many hours of communion that he had enjoyed with the Lord.

Such was the conduct of David. O virtues of the greatest saints, how frail are you when the Almighty withdraws the breath which animates you, and by which alone you subsist! when he suspends the communication of that grace by which alone you are supported!

Are there any who are ready to justify their enormities from the example of David? Who are saying

to themselves, "If David, notwithstanding these enormous crimes, was a saint of God, and obtained pardon, I am safe?" Let such consider his habitual conduct, his splendid virtues, and his deep repentance. In examining his *habitual conduct*, we behold a heart devoted to God. He fell into acts of the greatest wickedness; but these were not permanent, but diametrically opposite to his general walk and conversation. Justice requires also that we should contrast his murder and adultery with the *splendid actions* of his life. "David," says the sacred historian, (1 Kings xv. 5.) "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." Not that he was free from human infirmities; but this was the only occasion in which he was guilty of one of those atrocious crimes, which hinders us from perceiving in the midst of his weaknesses the characters of a solid piety. Think of his confidence in God; of his trust in the everlasting covenant; of the magnanimity and clemency that he so often displayed; of his zeal for the glory of God; of his humility; of his acquiescence in the severest dispensations of providence; of the pious emotions which glow in his psalms, and were felt in his heart; and after taking this general review of his life, say if there are many who from the bed of death can look back to more numerous or more splendid monuments of piety and virtue. Consider too the *depth of his repentance*. Behold him prostrate in the dust, dissolved in tears, pleading for the life of his soul; looking back with unutterable anguish to his conduct; bearing the agonized remembrance of it to the grave; never palliating his crimes; fleeing for pardon to unmerited grace.

Read his penitential psalms; every word appears a groan, every sentence the sound of a broken heart. To deepen his humiliation and his penitence, he eternizes in his writings the memory of his excesses; he presents to ages to come the account of his guilt. He thinks that he would rob the All-merciful of his glory, if in concealing his crimes he lost the opportunity of blessing, of adoring that grace which had forgiven them. He seizes the same harp which has soothed his griefs when he celebrated the praises of his Creator, and the mercies he had received from him, that by its mournful tones it may now reproach him with his rebellion and ingratitude. After these considerations, say, thou sneering infidel, thou careless sinner, thou unsound professor, whether the crimes of David can justify thy iniquities.

My brethren, this subject surely cries to us in a voice of thunder, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Whatever may be your situation in life, your attainments, your experience, you still have within you a corrupt nature, which if not restrained may conduct you to the greatest enormities. When you see a David falling into such sins, after all his past prayers and past fellowship with God; a Solomon indulging in the grossest idolatry, after the wisdom he had received from God; a Peter denying his Lord with execrations, after he had left all to follow the Redeemer, and had so often testified his attachment to him—when you see these melancholy examples, let them lead you to fear and distrust yourselves, and cause you to exercise a holy jealousy over your own hearts. Walk then humbly and dependently, if you would walk safely. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked:

and happy is he that feareth always." Let not the proud thought arise in your soul, "I am incapable of committing such open and gross enormities." Such pride will go before a fall; God will punish thee for this self-confidence, by leaving thee to thyself, and showing thee thy utter weakness and inability to resist temptation. Seek help therefore from God; and pray with David not only against smaller iniquities, but also against presumptuous sins, lest they obtain dominion over you.

This subject teaches us that one sin gradually leads us to another; that he who enters upon a criminal course knows not where he shall stop in his course; that he who indulges impetuous passions and inordinate appetites will shortly be deprived of the power of saying to them, "Hitherto shall ye come and no farther;" and that therefore our only safety is to be found in resisting the first approaches to crime, and "abstaining from all appearance of evil." Had David been previously informed of the complicated depravity of which he was guilty, he would have recoiled with horror; he would probably have cried with Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do these things?" But he was led on by degrees; each step more hardened his heart and stupified his conscience; each sin appeared to render a new one necessary to conceal it; till he was so enfeathered in the chains of sin and Satan that nothing but an Almighty power could have liberated him again. Oppose then the beginnings of evil; beware of cherishing one sinful thought; you know not to what lengths of guilt and shame it may carry you; you cannot tell where its destructive consequences will end.

This subject addresses those who, like David, have departed from the ways of the Lord; have violated their engagements; have wounded their consciences; have grieved the Spirit of God and his saints. When the Holy Ghost shows such persons the deep guilt and aggravations of their offences, they are ready to abandon themselves to utter despair; to suppose that there can be no mercy for them; and to think that they have committed that sin which is unpardonable. Your situation is indeed melancholy, but it is not desperate; look at David, and learn the infinitude of the mercy of your Father; listen to the forgiven and restored Psalmist, singing aloud of the righteousness and grace of the Lord, and feel that there is hope even for you. Only return unto Him from whom you have deeply revolted! There is a sacrifice which has sufficient virtue to expiate all your accumulated guilt. By the application of the blood of Jesus, and the communication of his Spirit, you shall obtain the restoration of peace with God, and strength to serve him in time to come; like David and like Peter recovered from your falls, you shall again participate of his favour and love.

Are there any presumptuous offenders who are ready to abuse these consolatory truths; who are saying to themselves, 'If sin can thus easily be pardoned, then there is little danger in committing it: I will therefore indulge in iniquity, and on my repentance I shall be as happy as the greatest saints?' Such reasoning displays a deeply corrupted soul. That man never knew the grace of God, who makes it a plea for his continuance in sin. Besides, are you certain that you will repent? Will God assuredly, notwithstanding this ungrateful resolution, give you grace to turn unto him? Even should you escape

everlasting punishment, is it nothing to you to dishonour God and grieve the Spirit? And know you not, that though your iniquity should be pardoned, yet still it will be punished with stripes and the rod, and be followed by anguish of soul? David was forgiven; yet the sword never departed from his house in consequence of his transgression, and years of bitterness and distress were the fruit of his crimes: to his dying day the retrospection of these crimes planted daggers in his heart. Even though you were sure, which you are not, of repentance, yet accumulate not for yourself these miseries.

In reviewing this history, we are naturally led to ask, Why did Providence permit this shameful fall in David? or, to extend the question, Why does God allow sin to remain, and sometimes to break out forcibly in his regenerate children? This question cannot easily be answered. It is not for want of power to prevent it; for he could perfectly sanctify them. It is not for want of hatred to their sin; it appears as odious, more odious in them than in others. It is not for want of love to them; he regards them as his friends and his children. Why then does he not render them immaculately holy? The following are, perhaps, some of the reasons of this dispensation. These do not at all justify the offender, though they vindicate the providence of God, and show its omnipotence in educing good from evil itself.

1. By them, the grace of God, in justification, is illustriously, and will be eternally magnified. It is rich and infinite mercy for God to forgive our sins before conversion. It is rich and infinite mercy to pardon and love, notwithstanding the remains of indwelling corruption. Every believer with the apos-

tle Paul, when contemplating the "body of death" that he bears about with him, finds a new sweetness in the grace of the gospel, and thanks God with greater rapture for Jesus Christ. But when, after greater falls, the voice of pardon is heard, the heart swells with adoring wonder of the grace communicated to so base, so unworthy a rebel. Can the hallelujahs of a seraph vie with the flaming love of a Peter, when he recalls the tender look of Jesus, which recalled him to his duty, and assured him of forgiveness? How tuneless is the harp of Gabriel, compared with that of David, when, recalling his fall and his forgiveness, he celebrates the grace of the Most Merciful, and the merits of Immanuel!

2. They are thus taught the depth of that iniquity which is in them, and rendered humble and dependent. Never did David so pathetically and emphatically bewail the corruption of human nature, as in his penitential psalms; never with such ardour did he make mercy his only plea; never did he more fully acknowledge and feel, that unless God upheld him by his free Spirit, he must fall. Peter, before his denial, was confident of his own strength, and exalted himself above his brethren; but afterwards his carnal confidence in himself and his own strength were destroyed for ever; and he perpetually exhorts believers to watchfulness, to holy fear, and dependence.

3. Thus they are taught to value more dearly the advocacy and intercession of the Lord Jesus. Having thus painfully felt their weakness; knowing that they could not be sustained a moment without Him who "prayeth for them that their faith fail not;" with what gratitude do they look up to an interceding Redeemer! with what tears of thankfulness do

they read such declarations as that of John: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous!"

4. The remembrance of the anguish of soul which they endured before God restored unto them the joy of his salvation; the recollection of "the wormwood and the gall," inspire them with additional fear of sin, and make them more studious to mortify it. They tremble at the disease they have already felt, and walk in holy fear. David, crushed by the recollection of the sin which had defiled him, opposes all iniquity, and looks to the very root of sin, and hates it in its source.

5. They are thus, by the wonderful providence of God, fitted for service. "When thou art converted," says Christ to Peter, after predicting his fall, "strengthen thy brethren." By the bitter experience of the power of sin, they can admonish others against it. It is Peter who particularly warns those to whom he writes, not to "deny the Lord that bought them." By the sweet experience of pardoning mercy, they are fitted to direct the trembling, distressed, wounded soul to the fountain of grace. Because they have found the mercy of God to themselves, they will put on the spirit of meekness and compassion to others; they feel the force of that exhortation of the apostle, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye that are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted." Ah! think you that David, after this lamentable proof of his own weakness, ever displayed the temper of an elder brother to any poor penitent prodigal?

6. The sins of believers make them long for heaven. They are made ready to drop this body of



flesh, if with it they may drop the body of sin and death. "They groan, being burdened," and sigh for that land of perfect holiness, where they shall no longer offend their God. They cry with David, while crushed with the sense of indwelling sin, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away and be at rest." (Ps. lv. 6.)

Such, my brethren, are some of the benefits which God, in his wonderful and adorable providence, educes even from sin, the worst of evils, an evil greater than hell. Such were probably some of the reasons why he permitted the fall of David and of others. Do not here misunderstand me. I repeat it; these good effects produced by God do not, in the smallest degree, justify the transgressor, or diminish the blackness of his guilt. Is there a person present who is resolved to indulge in sin, because God can over-rule it for good? Let him listen to the apostle Paul, and tremble: "We be slanderously reported, and some affirm that we say, Let us do evil that good may come: whose damnation is just."

The conscience of David, after the commission of crime, remained for a long time stupified and insensible: but he was at last recovered by the mercy of God, and returned to his former zeal, though he had not his former comforts.

The Lord sent to him a prophet to reprove, to convict, and instruct him. This prophet was Nathan, who is known to us only by his connexion with David. God often employed him to manifest the divine will to this prince, to whom it may be said he was a tutelary angel. He consoled David in his afflictions and persecutions by Saul, by the prediction of the prosperity that should follow them; he humbled him in his prosperity, by the denunciation of the misery

that awaited him; he roused him from his spiritual lethargy, by the exhibition of the greatness of his crime; he declared the remission of his sins to him when penitent; he defended him in his old age against the faction of Adonijah and his followers; he put the crown upon the head of his successor; and, after his death, wrote his history, a work which has not reached us, unless, as is probable, it is incorporated in the book of Kings. Such was the man selected by God to make David feel the enormity of his guilt, and to denounce the punishment with which it would be followed.

Nathan performed this office with all the respect due to his king, and at the same time with all the firmness becoming a messenger from that God, of whom this king was both the creature and the subject. Under a feigned character, he, in a beautiful apologue, represented to David the baseness of his conduct, and made him his own judge. Perceiving not the design of the parable, the wrath of David was excited against the supposed transgressor; and ordered, that not only, according to the law, the criminal should restore fourfold, but that also, from the circumstances which aggravated his guilt, he should die. Thus odious does vice appear, when we coolly view it in the conduct of another; but, deluded by self-love, we form a thousand excuses for ourselves, for those same crimes which we execrate in our neighbour.

Nathan immediately raised the veil which concealed from David his guilt; declared that he had pronounced sentence upon himself; and, with a holy majesty and solemnity cried to him, "Thou art the man!" A light from heaven instantly darted into the soul of the royal culprit. With anguish and horror,

with shame and self-abhorrence, he cried, "I have sinned against the Lord!" He who reads the heart, saw that his penitence was sincere; and Nathan was instructed instantly to reply to him, "The Lord hath taken away thy sin; thou shalt not die;" i. e. thou shalt not immediately undergo that temporal death which thou hast deserved, but shalt be spared as a monument of mercy, and shalt be freed from the eternal death which thou hast merited. Yet though pardoned, he was still to be chastised; and Nathan announced to him, that as he had slain Uriah by the sword, so the sword should never depart from his house; that in his own family he should be wounded by the perpetration of the same crime which he had committed. These predictions were all accomplished: we behold nothing but calamities in the remainder of his reign. The sentence that he himself had pronounced, was literally accomplished: he restored fourfold, when four of his sons, the child of Bathsheba, Ammon, Absalom, and Adonijah, perished by a violent or premature death.

"Now unto Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen."

## SERMON XXXIII.



## LIFE OF MANASSEH.



2 KINGS XXI. 1—18. 2 CHRON. XXXIII. 1—20.

THE life of Manasseh, which is contained in these portions of scripture, abounds with valuable instructions. It teaches us the deep depravity of human nature ; it shows us the fatal progress in guilt which is made by those who revolt from God ; it displays the nature and the efficacy of repentance ; and manifests the height and depth of divine mercy. It is a history which has often comforted the bursting heart of the penitent, and disposed him, notwithstanding his felt unworthiness and guilt, to raise his weeping eyes with humble confidence to the throne of the Most Merciful.

Manasseh was the fifteenth king of Judah. He was longer seated on the throne than any of his predecessors, swaying the sceptre for fifty-five years, and was the only one who, having groaned in captivity, was restored to his crown. He was the son, perhaps the only child, as well as the successor of Hezekiah, than whom Judah produced few kings more deservedly celebrated for wisdom, valour, true piety, and ardent zeal. Alas ! how different was the character of his son ! Grace is not here-

ditary. The pious parent often has his heart wrung by the crimes of his son; while, on the other hand, a holy child sometimes is found imploring God for a vicious father. Of this there can be no stronger proof than the good Hezekiah, who had for a father the impious Ahaz; and for a son, the profligate Manasseh. Important as are holy instructions and pious examples, yet something more, the powerful grace of God, and the omnipotent energy of the spirit, are necessary to renew the soul and sanctify the heart and life. Of Hephzibah, the mother of Manasseh, we know nothing but the name, and cannot tell whether she was pious or ungodly. If she was irreligious, we need not wonder at the wickedness of her son: for, passing with our mothers those early years when our minds and our hearts receive their first impressions, we shall almost certainly be regardless of God if they neglect him. And, on the contrary, the tender advices, the earnest entreaties, and the fervent prayers of a beloved mother, will often draw down the special benediction of God upon her offspring. Timothy owed much to his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that many who hear me, owe their first serious impressions to those maternal counsels that were early given, and cherished by tears and by prayers. On the contrary, if Hephzibah were really enlightened and pious, and ably concurred with Hezekiah in directing her son to God, we need not wonder at his heaven-daring wickedness, and the excess of his guilt, when he neglected their counsels. For holy instructions, like the other means of grace, will harden if they do not soften; and those who leap over most barriers, who break through most restraints, advance with most violence and

desperation in the ways of sin. It is for this reason that the irreligious children of eminently holy parents are so often the chief of sinners.

[A. C. 695.] Manasseh was early deprived by death of his excellent father, and, at the age of twelve, ascended the throne of Judah. The death of a parent is at all times irreparable. When we have bid farewell to the wisdom and tenderness which guided us through life; when the heart which beat high with affection for us has been stopped by death; and when we have had time to look round upon a world where true friends are so rarely to be found, we shall often, unless destitute of feeling, visit in imagination the grave of our father, of our mother, and weep for such friends as these. But especially is the death of a pious parent to be lamented, when he leaves us surrounded with temptations and snares. Perilous indeed is the situation of a young person when in the midst of the seductions of an elevated state, the instructor of his youth rests in the tomb; the monitory voice of his parent is silent in death, and his intercessions for his child at the throne of grace have ceased for ever. Parents, this may soon be your case. In a short time you may be removed from your beloved offspring. Oh! then, seize with avidity the moments that are rapidly flying, and employ them in counsels, instructions, and prayers for your children, that the hours of death may not be embittered by a consciousness of your neglect.

“Wo unto thee, O land,” exclaimed Solomon, the wisest of the predecessors of Manasseh, “when thy king is a child.” The justness of this remark is fully shown by the torrent of vices and calamities which now deluged Judah. The signal reformation which

was effected in the reign of Hezekiah was soon forgotten. The courtiers and nobles were not sincere in this glorious work, and soon seduced the new king to unite with them in revolting from God. Manasseh first rebuilt the high places which his father had destroyed. This was comparatively a slight infraction of the laws of God, since sacrifices were there offered to Jehovah. It was not idolatry, but the erection of altars which God had not sanctified. Vice and irreligion, however, are always progressive. This step was followed by the introduction of the grossest idolatry, and all the absurd, lewd, and sanguinary rites of the heathens. The statues of Baal were every where erected, and worship paid, not to the great Creator, but to the luminaries of heaven. Hitherto, even among the most idolatrous princes, the temple was the asylum of true religion; and those who were not drawn away by the example of the king and the multitude, could repair to the altars of Jehovah, there to pay their sacrifices and their vows. But Manasseh, as though determined to outrage God more pointedly, introduced his idols and their altars into the two courts of the temple. But one step more remained: it was to rear his idols in the sanctuary itself. This also was done; and Astarte was worshipped in the house dedicated to the Lord, who is jealous of his glory.

When Manasseh became a father, "he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of Hinnom," either offering them in sacrifice to Moloch, or consecrating them to the service of this idol. Instead of consulting the living and true God, he devoted himself to divination, auguries, and the other superstitious arts which the Lord had forbidden. According to the declaration of the inspired

writer, he “made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.”

Idolatry has always been accompanied with cruelty; we are not, therefore, surprised to be told that “he shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another.” Numbers, notwithstanding his example and authority, remained attached to the God of their fathers. They mourned over the prevalent idolatry; they refused to be present at these abominable ceremonies; they denounced the wrath and the judgments of Jehovah. Their reproofs, instead of correcting, inflamed Manasseh; their piety was esteemed the greatest of crimes; and as he could not tear from them their generous attachment to religion and the glory of God, he quenched their remonstrances in their blood. It is a general tradition among the Jews that Isaiah, the venerable counsellor and friend of his father, was among the number who thus perished: but of the truth of this assertion there is no proof.\*

His sins were aggravated by his refusal to listen to admonitions. Special messengers were sent to him. “The Lord spake to Manasseh and his people; but they would not hearken.” He thus appeared to defy the indignation of the Almighty, and to provoke his thunders.

Such was Manasseh! Who is not humbled at this picture of human nature? Who does not tremble at considering how far we may revolt from God and holiness? Who that remembers that he has within

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\* See it disproved, in Saurin's Dissert. tom. vi. pp. 444—454.



himself the self-same seeds of original corruption as had this unhappy man, does not extol that restraining grace which has kept him from these enormities?

Such was Manasseh! Who would not expect that we should next be informed that he became a signal trophy of the divine indignation, and that the holiness and power of that God whom he had contemned were glorified in his awful destruction. But, ("Oh! the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and mercy of God!") renewing grace sanctifies his heart, and sovereign grace blots out all his sins.

The justice and the goodness of God unite in visiting him with afflictions which shall at last rouse him. The king of Assyria, probably Esarhaddon, sent his army against Judah. This army was no longer opposed by the ardent and prevalent prayers of Hezekiah, and was successful. Manasseh was seized in a thicket, whither he had fled for safety; his hands and his feet were fettered, and he was carried in chains a prisoner to Babylon.

What a reverse in his situation! No longer feared by a subject people, but the sport of his enemies; stripped of his glory and kingdom, and the delights of his palace succeeded by the solitude of a loathsome dungeon. Such great vicissitudes can rarely happen; but the perpetual changes which occur in life should surely admonish us to seek "that kingdom which cannot be moved;" that crown of glory which cannot be wrested from us; "those riches which are durable;" those "pleasures which flow at God's right hand for evermore." Such were the effects which, under the influence of God's good Spirit, were produced upon Manasseh. "When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and

humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him; and Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God." The scales fall from his eyes; his illusions are dissipated; he sees, he feels the power of that God whom he had defied. In the silence of his dungeon, all his crimes, with all their aggravations, are present to his view. The haughty rebel bends; his soul is filled with anguish, not for the loss of his kingdom and the weight of his chains, but for the pollution of his soul. Detesting himself, and seeing no resource but in the unbounded mercy of God, he turns to him, and invokes him with ardour, with faith, and with contrition.

This change was certainly produced by almighty power. In observing it, none could fail to cry out, "It is the Lord's doing, and is wondrous in our eyes." Yet God works by means, and no doubt it was connected with the prayers and instructions of his father, and with the afflictions which he endured. Hezekiah had often carried Manasseh in the arms of faith and prayer to the mercy-seat. His petitions were not disregarded by the Lord, but are now answered; and he is not alone, for the supplications of many pious parents are repositied as a treasure in heaven, and are answered in the conversion of their children after they are sleeping in the dust. Hast thou, careless man, been blest with a parent whose closet has often witnessed his tears, and groans, and prayers for thee? Arise, and, with Manasseh, call upon the God of thy fathers. The holy instructions given to him in early life now recur to his mind, direct him in his duty, and encourage him to approach the God of grace. I have before quoted to you the remark of an accurate observer of life, that "conversions in advanced life are most commonly the re-

surrection of those seeds which had been sown in infancy, but had long been stifled by the violence of youthful passions, or the pursuits of ambition, and the hurry of an active life." Be not discouraged, then, Christian parent, nor relax in your exertions, because your children appear unaffected by your counsels. These seeds which you now scatter may germinate when you, like Hezekiah, are in glory.

Afflictions have been often sanctified to others as well as Manasseh. How many thousands have been first led to God by heavy trials, pains, disappointments, or bereavements! These humbled the pride of their hearts, and taught them their guilt, when milder methods had been employed in vain. Child of calamity, what effect have thy sorrows produced upon thee? Have they led thee, like Manasseh, penitently to the Lord? Or may it be recorded of thee as of Ahab his grandfather, "In the time of his distress he did trespass yet more against the Lord?" Ah! this is indeed the very temper of the lost, who "gnaw their tongues for pain, and blaspheme the God of heaven because of their pains, and repent not of their deeds."

And was there mercy for such a sinner? Yes; "the Lord was entreated of him, and heard his supplication." All his iniquities were blotted out, and the poor, trembling culprit, was cheered with the hope of pardon and acceptance with his God. Ah! brethren, will we still revolt from such a God? Will we still refuse to listen to him, calling to us from the height of heaven? It is not the voice of an implacable tyrant pursuing the obstinate rebel, but that of a tender father recalling the wandering child. Oh! let us flee into his arms, that we may taste the preciousness of his love.

In consequence of his repentance, he was freed from his sins and his chains, and, restored to his former dignity, continued to reign for many years. Ye who have made solemn promises to God on the bed of sickness, in the gloom of sorrow, under the pressure of calamity, but who have forgotten them all when restored to health and joy; ye probably suppose that Manasseh, like you, forgot all his engagements when again seated on the throne. No; he was indeed renewed, and he "brought forth fruits meet for repentance." His care was unremitted to destroy that idolatry which he had promoted. Restoring the worship of God, and purifying the temple, he offered on the altars of Jehovah peace-offerings and thank-offerings, and endeavoured to lead back those whom he had corrupted.

But notwithstanding he knew that his sins were forgiven, what agony did he feel in beholding the memorials of his crimes; with what agony did he look back upon his years of vanity and guilt; with what tears did he recollect that he could not repair the evils he had done; that many who had been seduced by his example were already in the eternal flames; that others were insensible to his admonitions, and would finally perish; that his own son, imitating his guilt and not his repentance, still continued attached to idols. Young persons, would you avoid such heart-rending retrospections, early turn to the Lord, and benefit society by the example of your first as well as last days.

Having reigned fifty-five years, he died, and was buried, probably by his own express command, privately in the garden of his house, humbly considering himself unworthy to lie with his ancestors.

My brethren, there is no portion of scripture that

is not liable to abuse. The instances of rich and adorable grace that are recorded in the holy volume induce many to live thoughtlessly and securely in rebellion against God. But presume not, careless man, from this history, that it will be well with thee though, like Manasseh, thou add crime to crime. There are instances of those who are recovered after going to the greatest lengths of wickedness, that we may see that our Redeemer is "strong and mighty to save," and that none may despair: these instances are few, that none may presume. "There were," says Bishop Hall, "many Jeroboams, and Abijams, and Ahabs, and Joashes, and Ahazes, on these sacred thrones: there was but one Manasseh."

Humbled and broken-hearted penitent, receive consolation from this history! The same God who forgave Manasseh is ready to forgive thee. Approach him with faith and penitence, and though "thy sins be as crimson," thou shalt obtain the pardon of them all. They are not greater than the atonement that is provided; they do not more loudly demand thy perdition, than the blood of Christ demands thy salvation, if thou flee to it. If all the sins committed since the creation of the world were united in thee, yet if this blood were sprinkled upon thy conscience, it should obtain for thee salvation. Commit thyself to Jesus, and cry, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he hath saved us:" and then thou shalt hereafter join with the countless number of redeemed sinners in shouting "Unto him that hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood, and hath made us kings and priests to his God and Father, unto him be the everlasting glory. Amen."

## SERMON XXXIV.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. I.



BIRTH OF A VIRGIN—INCARNATION—TIME OF HIS ADVENT.

LUKE, i. 35.

*That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called  
the Son of God.*

SUCH was part of the salutation of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, when he appeared to reveal to her the honour which God was about to confer upon her. It is not my intention particularly to explain these words, or to illustrate all the circumstances of the annunciation. I have chosen them to conduct me to a subject introductory to a course of sermons, which will for some time occupy your attention the morning of every sabbath, on the life of your Saviour.

Following the relations of the evangelists, we shall trace him from the manger to the cross, illustrating his life, his doctrine, and his miracles. Nothing can be more important than this design: and if I have

your prayers and the blessing of God, I trust you will find that nothing could be more instructive and useful. It is the life of Him who came down from heaven, to teach you by his example the path thither; and to die, that all the obstructions to your felicity might be removed. It is the life of Him, who was animated by the most expansive benevolence; who, influenced by no selfish passion, seeking only the welfare of mankind, ever "went about doing good." It is the life of Him, in whom were laid up the treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge, who spake as never man spake, and who alone can instruct us in the will of God and our duty. It is the life of Him, whose example, of all those who have ever lived upon earth, is alone free from spot, and may be followed, at all times, with confidence and security.

Immediately after the apostacy of man, the Messiah was promised to our first parents to repair the ruins of the fall; and in proportion as the time of his advent approached, more definite and precise predictions concerning him were given, to nourish the faith and hope of the ancient church, and clearly to designate this Redeemer when he should appear. The place, the time, the manner of his birth; the events of his life; the circumstances of his death, were foretold, and an anticipated history of him given by the Spirit of God.

Among other remarkable predictions, it was declared, more than seven hundred years before his appearance in the world, that he should be *born of a Virgin*. For reasons which we shall see in the prosecution of this discourse, it was expedient that the Messiah should be really man, of the same nature and race with us. But though it was proper that he

should be born of a woman that he should be the Son of Man; it was also fit that he should be born of a Virgin, that it might clearly and satisfactorily be shown to all men, that he was the Son of God, that his original was divine. Besides, by entering upon the world thus miraculously, the reverence and veneration, the expectations and hope of mankind would be excited. Can we avoid regarding him with deference and faith whose birth was so peculiar and supernatural, so evidently produced by the immediate influence of God? And, finally, in no other way could the Messiah have avoided that stain of original pollution which would have rendered him unfit for the office of Mediator, and incapable of atoning for the sins of man. For these and similar reasons Jesus was born of a Virgin.

The person on whom God conferred this exalted privilege of being the mother of Jesus, was Mary, of the tribe of Judah, and family of David; nobly descended, but in indigent circumstances; having none of the pomps and splendours which dazzle the world, but possessed of that piety and virtue which secured the love of God. The power of the Holy Ghost overshadowed her, and Jesus was born.

I shall not wound your feelings, my brethren, by mentioning the profane sneers which have been thrown on this important doctrine. There can be nothing incredible in this miracle to those who believe any miracles at all. He who established the laws of nature can control them at his pleasure; and that he did control them on this occasion is proved by the declarations of those scriptures, the evidence of which has appeared only more irrefragable from the subtlest and strongest attacks of infidelity; by the public and innumerable miracles of the Saviour's



life; and by his well attested resurrection from the dead. To these we appeal for the truth of his miraculous incarnation and birth. "If he did not the works of his Father, works which none other man did, believe not on him."

To this Jesus, thus born of a virgin, the eternal Son of God united himself in an ineffable manner, so that in one Christ there was a true humanity and a true divinity.

This doctrine lies at the very foundation of our religion. It therefore deserves our attention. Let us come then to the contemplation of this profound "mystery of godliness," with that reverence which becomes weak and short-sighted creatures, when they view the abysses of divine wisdom and grace. Let us follow the guidings of revelation and reason as far as they can lead us; and when they cease to conduct us, let us not dare to lift that veil which covers the proceedings of God; let us not rashly attempt to penetrate within those clouds which surround his throne; but let us adore in silence what we cannot comprehend.

The fact itself, that Christ is true God and true man, is written with a sun-beam in every part of the holy volume. In it you find the most exalted and appropriate names, titles, and perfections of God ascribed to him; divine works attributed to him; and the same worship required to be paid to him as is paid to the Father. What stronger evidence can there be that he is truly God. You also find him represented with a body subject to the same innocent infirmities and frailties, and possessing the same properties with our own; and with a soul with the same faculties as ours: was he not then truly man?

In most of the predictions concerning him, these two natures are distinctly recognised. "A virgin shall conceive and bear a son;" here is his humanity: "His name shall be called Emmanuel," "God with us;" here is his divinity. "Unto us a Son is born; unto us a Child is given;" here is his humanity: "The government shall be laid upon his shoulder; he shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace;" here is his divinity. It would be easy to collect numberless similar passages. In the New Testament also, many texts unite both natures. "The holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh." "God manifest in the flesh." Your own knowledge of the scriptures will supply you with numerous passages of the same import.

An examination of every part of our Saviour's life presents us with the two natures. In his birth we see a man, laid in the manger, and persecuted by Herod; and a God whom the angels celebrate, and the magi adore. In his baptism we perceive a man who submits to this ceremony from John, and a God declared by the voice from heaven. In the ship we behold a man overwhelmed with sleep, and a God whom the winds and waves obey. At the tomb of Lazarus, we contemplate a man who weeps, and a God who by his voice restores life, and wrests from death its prey. On the cross we view a man who dies, and a God who confers heaven on the penitent thief. Every where, in short, we behold in the incarnate Son the perfect union of the two natures.

His mediatorial office rendered it necessary that he should be both God and man. It was necessary

that he should be *God*, that he might be possessed of power sufficient to save us. None but an almighty arm could remove the obstructions to our felicity; could subdue our spiritual enemies; could vanquish the powers of hell, and abolish death in our behalf. It was necessary that he should be God, that from the dignity of his person his merits might be infinite; adequate to conciliate the favour of God to us, to appease his wrath against us, to satisfy his justice which was kindled against us, and to magnify his law, the curses of which impended over our heads. It was necessary that he should be God, that his laws should have supreme authority, his doctrine the greatest efficacy and obligation, and his example the strongest weight and certainty. It was necessary that he should be God, because the redemption and salvation of mankind was not only a work too difficult to be achieved by any creature, but also an honour too great to be conferred on any except a God.

It was also requisite that he should be man, that he might give us an example of the virtues we must practise; that he might be offered up as a victim for our sins; that in the nature which had transgressed, an atonement might be made; that we might have a familiar and confident access to him; that from his resurrection we might be assured of our own. I do not enlarge on this point. Do you yourselves review every part of his mediatorial office, and you will see new reasons why it was proper he should be both God and man.

But, *in what manner* were these two natures united in him? Here we must confess our ignorance. No human language can clearly express the nature of this mysterious union; no human mind can properly conceive it. All that we can do is to show what opi-

nions concerning it are to be rejected, because they are inconsistent with scripture, or the nature of things. This union then is not merely the concurrence of the divinity and humanity for the production of the same work, in the same manner as many causes may concur for the production of the same effect. This was the error of Nestorius, who taught that in one Christ there were not only two natures, but also two persons, who were associated together by a common unction, and concurred in the work of redemption. But this sentiment is opposed by the terms in which the scriptures speak of the incarnation. They tell us, not that the Word was *associated* with the flesh, but “was *made* flesh;” that “God sent forth his Son *made of* a woman;” that the same Son, who was “the brightness of his Father’s glory,” *by himself* purged our sins. All those passages too in which the actions, properties, and sufferings of one nature are ascribed to the other, prove the unity of person in Christ. Were there two persons, this mode of speaking, so frequent in the scriptures, would be improper and absurd. This union was made in such a manner that the two natures were *not mingled* with each other; it did not resemble the union of two substances, forming a third substance distinct in properties from them both. For if this were the case, Christ would have been neither God nor man; which is not only a dangerous error, but also an impossibility. The two natures, though in union, subsist distinct and entire, each preserving its essential properties. This union was not made in such a manner as to *change one nature into another*. This is impossible and inconceivable. The eternal God cannot become temporary; the infinite Jehovah cannot be circumscribed by limits. Neither on the other hand can a

corporeal substance be changed into a spiritual one, a finite into an infinite. These three errors being rejected, all that we can positively say on this point is, That the eternal and ever blessed Son of God did, in the fulness of time, assume a human nature, with all its innocent passions, affections, and infirmities, into union with his divinity, so that these two natures formed but one person.

There are many who have gone further, and traced resemblances of this union in nature. These resemblances are all of them imperfect. There is nothing in the whole frame of nature which can fully parallel this mystery. Nevertheless, the union of our soul and body in one person in some degree illustrates it. These two substances are different in kind, in properties, in dignity; the one of itself material, divisible, corruptible, and senseless: the other immaterial, indivisible, incorruptible, endued with life, knowledge, and feeling: and both of them capable of a separate existence. Yet these two are united in a manner impossible for us to conceive, and concur to form a man. In their union they remain distinct in substance, each of them retaining its peculiar properties, without any confusion, or change of one into the other; and from them the same man is termed corporeal or spiritual, mortal or immortal. In like manner, though in a degree still more wonderful, the divine and human natures are conjoined in one Christ.

I feel, my brethren, that I express myself most imperfectly on this abstruse subject. I feel that there are obscurities in this subject which cannot be dispelled. But what then? Shall we reject the doctrine, because in some respects it is incomprehensible? Cannot infinite wisdom, sustained by infinite

power, perform any thing beyond the comprehension of weak mortals? Does not reason itself teach us that it is probable, that in beings so highly elevated above us there may be modes of existence and action, unions and distinctions, to conceive of which our apprehensions may be too coarse, and to express which our language may be totally inadequate? You might have some shadow of reason to reject a doctrine because it was incomprehensible, if your faculties were so perfect and extensive as to pierce into the essences of things, and combine in your mind the past, the present, and the future. But that you, the child of darkness, the insect of a day, who can behold only some rude effects of things, while their essences remain hidden from you in inaccessible darkness; that you, who cannot pierce into the nature of a pebble, who are baffled in your philosophy about a gnat, or a worm, that you should vainly debate concerning the profoundest mysteries of God, and arrogantly reject what you cannot perfectly understand: what despicable folly! what impious pride! Do you say, (for some persons have dared to say it,) that this doctrine is not only incomprehensible, but also *contradictory*? Prove your assertion, and we will reject it; for though Christianity requires us to believe on the testimony of an unerring God things that are *above* our reason, it never requires of us an assent to things *contrary* to reason. It would be a contradiction, if we said that Jesus Christ is God in the same respect that he is man, and man in the same respect that he is God. But we say that he is God in one respect, and man in another. This is wonderful and mysterious, but not contradictory. It would be a contradiction, if we said that what was divine and infinite in Jesus Christ became human and finite by a real

change. But we say that what is divine and infinite is united to what is human and finite, in such a manner that the divine nature has lost none of its glories and perfections. This is wonderful; this we cannot precisely explain; but it is not contradictory. It would be a contradiction, if we said that the humanity of the Saviour received the incommunicable attributes of the divinity. But we say that the properties of the divinity have not been communicated to the humanity; that if this humanity has been elevated to a high degree of glory, it is a glory capable of being enjoyed by a creature, and inferior to that of the divinity. Here there is not the shadow of contradiction.

If I have detained you a long time on this point, attribute it, my brethren, to the importance and difficulty of the subject; and bear with me a little longer, while I more briefly consider the time of the Saviour's advent.

The *time* of this wonderful event was fixed by ancient prophecy. It was to take place while the second temple still stood, at the expiration of the seventy weeks of Daniel, and before the sceptre had departed from Judah. These marks all coincided at the precise period when Jesus was born. A very little reflection will cause us to admire the wisdom of God in selecting this particular time for the mission of his Son. It was proper that he should not come into the world immediately after the fall; that his appearance should be deferred till mankind were able properly to appreciate, and duly to receive so great a blessing. Since such an infinite display of divine goodness and mercy could be made but once, (for otherwise, as the apostle remarks, Christ must often have suffered from the foundation of the world)

it was fit that suitable provisions should be made for the reception and continuance of the gospel in the world, and proper preparations made to show its evidence, to display its worth, and make men sensible of the richness of the blessing. But could this preparation have been made, had the Saviour appeared in the earlier ages of the world? Could the Jews have been trained up for his coming by prophecies, by types, by their law? Could the Gentiles have been made sensible of the inadequacy of unassisted reason to discover these truths connected with their dearest interests, and the corruption of their nature in not being able to perform those duties which they did discover? Besides, had Christ appeared in the earliest ages of the world, we could not at the present day have had sufficient reasons to assure us of the divinity of his religion. The two firm pillars upon which it rests are, prophecy and miracles. Had Christ appeared immediately after the fall, few prophecies concerning him could have been accomplished, and it would have been difficult for us who live now to prove that those few had been made before the event. And as to his miracles, he should be but little influenced by them if they had been wrought (as on such a supposition they would have been) among people ignorant, inexperienced, credulous, and incapable of conveying down with certainty to posterity the events which occurred among them. It was then necessary that some time should elapse before the advent of Christ, that men might feel their need of a Saviour, and instructor, and be disposed to receive him; and that his religion might be accompanied by such evidence as to satisfy every rational mind. And that no previous period would have been so proper for the Saviour's coming



as that which he chose, may be shown from the following considerations :

1. In no previous period was he needed so much to reform both the morals and the religion of the world. As to the Jews, both the magistracy and ministry were in the lowest state of depravity ; the most sacred offices publicly exposed to sale ; the temple converted into a place of merchandise ; and the whole people so debased, that Josephus, their own historian, speaking of them a few years after, says, that if the Romans had delayed taking vengeance on them, he believes their city must either have been swallowed up by an earthquake or a deluge, or destroyed by fire from heaven, as Sodom was, since it produced a much more impious generation. The Gentiles were not less corrupt, though they could scarcely be more so. Human nature could not be sunk lower than it was in every species of vice and sensuality. Of this the description given of them by St. Paul, which is confirmed by their own writers, is a sufficient proof. *Religion* was in no less deplorable a state than morals. The ceremonial law of the Jews, from the numberless additions made to it, had become a heavy and insupportable yoke ; the moral was degraded by their loose casuistry, and almost made void by their traditions. The prophecies had been darkened by corrupt glosses, and the key of knowledge taken from the nation. Among the Gentiles, philosophy had been so far cultivated as to show its own insufficiency, and the absurdity of the popular fables and superstitions. Philosophers were left in absolute uncertainty ; laughing at omens and portents, the Elysian fields and Pluto's kingdom, but unable to discover any system to substitute in the place of the common fables. The wor-

ship of the populace had attained to its highest point of absurdity and impiety, and all who made any pretensions to wisdom laughed at and derided it. The world was then fully ripe for the appearance of him who taught a pure system of morals and a rational religion.

2. It was proper that Christ should appear in the age when he did, because it was, more than any that had preceded it, able to examine the evidence of his revelation, to confirm its truth, and convey it to posterity. It was an inquisitive and skeptical age, and therefore not likely to be imposed upon, or to receive a new religion without thoroughly examining it. It was an age that had sufficient knowledge of nature to enable it to judge of miracles, and distinguish them from any uncommon appearance, or effect of art. It was an age when prophecy had ceased among the Jews, and when they would therefore cautiously investigate any new claims to inspiration; when oracles and divinations were despised, and all revelation looked upon as a cheat by most of the Gentiles; and when therefore they were guarded against any new imposition. The character of the age then was such as to give a stronger confirmation to the religion of Christ than could have been given in any previous age.

This age too was the best qualified to hand religion down to posterity. The Roman empire had been just settled, and the minds of its chief members turned from arms and action to works of genius and speculation; their chronology had just been reformed and adjusted; exact reviews taken of the most distant provinces; and all remarkable occurrences transmitted to Rome, the capital of the world. In such a state of affairs no great event could be long

concealed. Was it not highly proper that at such a time Christ should appear, when the period of his incarnation should be fixed beyond controversy? Had he come in an obscure, fabulous age, we might perhaps by this time have doubted whether there was ever any such person; at least, whether any of the relations concerning him could be depended on.

3. Finally, the universal expectation that prevailed at the time that Christ appeared, of some great deliverer who was to arise, rendered it a most proper period for his advent. The Jews, directed by the prophecies of the Old Testament, were anxiously looking for Messiah. Of this we have the fullest proofs in every page of the Gospels, in Josephus their own historian, and in their Talmuds. The Samaritans, notwithstanding their hatred of the Jews, united with them in this expectation, and in consequence of their hope, listened to the pretences of Dositheus, Simon Magus, and Menander, who pretended to the title of deliverer. Both Tacitus and Suetonius assure us that the same hopes prevailed among the Gentiles. Was there not then a peculiar propriety in selecting this time for the birth of the Saviour, when the expectations and desires of mankind had prepared them to receive him.

Such are probably some of the reasons which induced God to send his Son into the world at this peculiar period. He may have had many other and more important reasons which we cannot discern: but these are sufficient to show us that in this, as in all other cases, his conduct was infinitely wise and proper.

My brethren, we have found difficulties in the doctrine of the incarnation: we can find none however in the consequences to be deduced from it. Let me

briefly present you a few of these in the conclusion of this discourse.

1. The Son of God assumed our nature, that he might save us. What a motive is this to the highest *gratitude* and *love*! What can affect us, if we remain cold when considering the unspeakable love of God in giving his Son for our redemption; and the ineffable charity of the Son, who, though “ he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet took upon him the form of a servant,” in order that he might be capable of “ being obedient to death, even the death of the cross :” who, “ though he knew no sin, was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, that in the flesh God might condemn sin by making him a sin-offering?” Well might Paul term this boundless charity “ a love which passeth knowledge ;” for the tongue cannot express, nor the heart conceive, its extent. Angels “ desire to look into these things ;” it is an abyss of mercy, which even your intelligence cannot fathom; a mystery of grace, which even you cannot comprehend. What monsters of ingratitude then must we be, if it does not inflame our cold hearts, and fire them with thankfulness and love!

2. Christ became incarnate for our redemption. What a motive is this to *universal obedience*. He left the bosom of his Father, that he might “ purify to himself a people zealous of good works ;” shall we by neglecting his laws frustrate, as far as in us lies, this his merciful design? Shall we with so glorious an example before us be turned from the performance of our duty by any difficulty or danger? Since Christ for our sakes despoiled himself in a manner of the form of God, shall we not for his sake despoil ourselves of our sins and corruptions? He left for us

the delights of Paradise. shall we not leave for him the impure and gross pleasures of the world? He was born for us, shall not we be new-born for his service?

3. Christ became incarnate for our redemption. What a ground of *confidence* and *trust* in God under the most frowning aspect of his providence. This is a deduction of the apostle Paul, "He that spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, shall he not with him also freely give us all things." In all our sorrows we may now approach to God with comfort and hope; remembering that he is no stranger to human nature, much less an enemy to it, since the eternal Son has been pleased to take it into so close an union with his own. The very worst of men, and those most bowed down under a sense of sins and the apprehensions of divine wrath, may now approach their offended sovereign, cheered by the remembrance that they have "an advocate with the Father," who is God and man in the person of Jesus, and in the office of Mediator; and that nothing can exclude them from pardon but their own unwillingness and impenitence. And those who have been reconciled to God through Christ, may especially draw nigh the throne of grace, "with a true heart and in full assurance of faith," since there is seated upon it one who assumed their nature, with all its pains and sorrows; one who in this nature experienced every pang that rends the human heart, and who upon the throne of glory remembers his groans, and agonies, and cries.

Let your walk and conversation, my dear brethren, evince that the incarnation has had its proper effect upon you; and then, after being conducted during the days of your pilgrimage by the gospel star. God

shall introduce you, not like the wise men of the east into an humble Bethlehem, but into the glorious Jerusalem that is on high, there to contemplate and adore our Jesus, not as a feeble child, but as the great and mighty conqueror of sin and of death; not in the manger, but in the palace of the universe; not in the arms of a mortal, but at the right hand of the eternal Father; receiving, not merely the homages of a few men, but the adorations and services of angels and seraphim; of all the church triumphant in glory. To this divine Saviour, who was made flesh, to the Father, who gave him to us, and to the Holy Ghost, one God, be glory eternal.

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## SERMON XXXV.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. II.



PLACE AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS BIRTH—APPEARANCE OF THE ANGELS TO THE SHEPHERDS, AND THEIR VISIT TO BETHLEHEM.

LUKE ii. 1—21.

You recollect, my brethren, that on the last Sabbath we commenced the Life of our Saviour. We exhibited him to you born of a virgin: we examined

that great doctrine, the divinity and humanity united in one Christ; and we showed that the wisdom of God was manifested in the choice of the time of Messiah's advent.

Let us now proceed to consider the place and circumstances of his birth; the revelation of the angels to the shepherds, and their visit to Bethlehem.

The place which has for ever been rendered illustrious by the birth of Jesus, was Bethlehem, a small village of the tribe of Judah, about six miles from Jerusalem. Ancient prophecy had clearly and unequivocally pointed it out as the birth-place of Messiah. "Thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah," declared Micah, "though thou art little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth, one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." But how could this prediction be accomplished? Mary had resided for a long time at Nazareth: she expected and desired to wait the birth of the Saviour in that spot which had been consecrated by the annunciation of Gabriel and the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost; and a thousand circumstances concurred with her situation in preventing her from thinking of a tedious journey to Bethlehem. Was there not then danger that this prediction should fail, and Jesus want this characteristic of the Messiah? No, my brethren, "heaven and earth may pass away, but not one jot or one tittle" of the declarations "of God can fail till they all be accomplished." "His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure." He can always so arrange and combine events in the course of his providence, as to effect his design when their accomplishment appears most improbable to us. Behold this beautifully exemplified in the present case. Augustus,

placed at the head of the Roman empire, had long wished to obtain a correct estimate of its extent, its force, and resources. For this purpose he had more than once issued orders to his officers in the different provinces to make exact returns to him. These orders never could be perfectly executed. Sometimes internal insurrections, and at other times war on the frontiers, prevented. Now the Dacians, the Celts, the Dalmatians, in arms; then Cilicia and Armenia in arms, claimed all his attention; and in some instances, as in the case of Judea, his affection for a particular governor hindered him from imposing on him this mark of subjection. It was because the predestined moment, appointed by Providence and by prophesy, had not yet arrived. As soon as that moment has come, peace is established throughout the whole empire; the sword, which has so long dropped with blood, is returned to its scabbard; trifling misunderstandings destroy the affection of the Roman emperor for the Jewish prince; and Augustus, no longer indulging friendship for Herod, causes him to require of the inhabitants of Judea that enrolment of their names, and that oath of fidelity, which put the seal to their servitude. The edict of Cæsar is published. In conformity with this edict, all persons are obliged to go to the places whence their ancestors sprung, there to enrol themselves. Mary ascends to Bethlehem, the birth-place of David her ancestor, and there the Redeemer is born. Thus was verified the declaration of Micah. Thus was it also shown, that, in conformity with ancient prophesy, Jesus was of the tribe of Judah and family of David.

Christians! can you avoid pausing, and admiring the wisdom and the power of that Providence which thus effects its purposes by undesigning instruments?



Augustus thought only of his own glory; yet he was the means of fulfilling the predictions of the Old Testament, and of enstamping upon Jesus marks essential to the Messiah. Ah! how often have the sovereigns of the world, whilst animated by the most unworthy motives, unintentionally accomplished the designs of God, the decrees of his providence! Let this thought compose our hearts amidst the agitation of the nations. The Lord reigneth; He can bring good to his Church even from the crimes and follies of men. "The wrath of man shall praise him; the remainder of wrath he will restrain."

We have seen Mary conducted by Providence to Bethlehem. In what manner was she there received? Was she not welcomed with that affection and regard due to the pious and worthy descendant of a king whose memory was deservedly honoured in Judah, whose name was dear to every true Israelite? Did not the people crowd to meet her, and cry out with Elizabeth, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb?" Was not every delicate attention paid to her which her sex, her situation, and the honour conferred upon her by God, required? Ah no! the royal family of David had been reduced by time and revolutions. Mary, though adorned by virtue and religion, was poor: need I add, that she was therefore neglected. No door opened to receive her; no countenance was lighted up with pleasure at her approach; no kind kinsman expressed his affection for her; no benevolent stranger exercised towards her the offices of hospitality. Even in the inn\* she could find no shelter, but was

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\* Not a western inn, but an eastern caravansera. See *Salomonis Van Til Homilia Prima in Natatem Christi*, pp. 3, 9.

obliged, friendless and neglected, to retire to the stable. There the hour arrived when Jesus was born. With her own hands she wrapt him in swaddling-clothes, and laid him in a manger. He "whose is the earth and the fulness thereof," was thus born poor, despised, and destitute. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." God and his holy angels were present when he made his entrance upon the earth; but no affectionate and grateful mortals!

My brethren, you reprobate the inhumanity of the inhabitants of Bethlehem. In reprobating them, do you not condemn yourselves? They knew not what a guest they refused; they were ignorant that they shut their doors against that Messiah whom their nation had so long and so ardently expected. But can this plea be presented for your neglect of Jesus? He has long been crying to you, "Behold, I stand at the door" of your hearts, "and knock: hear my voice, and open the door, and I will come in and sup with you, and you with me." He has done this, not whilst he was the infant of Bethlehem, but since he has been manifested to be the Son of God; since "all power has been committed to him in heaven and on earth;" since he has been seated on the throne of the universe. Ah! then, instead of blushing for the inhabitants of Bethlehem, blush for yourselves.

Do you ask, why the Saviour, in entering upon the world, appeared in a situation so humble; why he did not come surrounded by greater worldly dignity and glory? I might content myself by replying, that men, illustrious by their virtues and their great actions, do not derive their glory from the external splendour which surrounds them, but from those

qualities which the world can neither confer on them nor ravish from them: that therefore, in whatever condition the Son of God may appear, he bears with him that essential glory which merits the homage and veneration of heaven and earth, which renders illustrious the places where he is, and the condition which he embraces.

But you need not stop at this general consideration. Particular reasons can easily be given, to show that this deep humiliation of your Saviour, instead of exciting those carnal prejudices which led the Jews to reject him, should only augment your love, your reverence, your admiration for him.

1. This humiliation of the Lord, as well as his incarnation, is voluntary, and results only from his overflowing compassion. No being was able to despoil him of his glory and his power. It is a sacrifice which his charity makes for the salvation of man. As he was "able to lay down his life, and to take it up again," he was also able to take it or lay it down in what circumstances he pleased. If he then was born in a stable, and laid in a manger, it was not through any necessity imposed upon him, but because he willed it. But a voluntary humiliation, instead of diminishing true greatness, always elevates it still higher.

2. The nature of his ministry and the intent of his incarnation, show the propriety of his humble and lowly birth. He did not come into the world to dazzle men with the brightness of his glory, or to affright them by the terror of his power; much less to display to them the dignities and splendours of the world. He came to tear from our hearts that inordinate attachment to earth and its enjoyments, which has caused the eternal perdition of so many souls.

He came to preach to us painful and mortifying duties, self-denial, a superiority to the world, a holy elevation above the joys and sorrows of this transient state. But would not these instructions have lost much of their efficacy if he had not confirmed them by his example? If he had been surrounded by all the dignities and pleasures of the world; if he had not marched before us through all the miseries of life, and conquered all the obstacles that could be opposed to the performance of our duties; would not men, always ingenious to deceive themselves, have declared that his precepts, though apparently proper, were impossible to be practised? But now he illustrates all that he commands. He declares, "Blessed are the poor," and he "has not where to lay his head." He preaches *humility of heart*; that humility so difficult to be acquired by man, that neither the infirmities and mortality of our bodies, nor the sins and weaknesses of our soul, nor the strokes inflicted upon us by the rod of the Almighty, can form without difficulty in man. He preaches this humility; but bids us learn it of him, who is the only one who has ever existed on the earth that might reasonably be exempt from this disposition of soul. "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart." He preaches to us *outward humility*, voluntary self-abasement. In the manger, as in a thousand other instances, he has practised it himself. He forbids us to fix our hearts on honours, pleasures, riches; he first renounced them himself. He has crucified the world, when in his holy instructions he has displayed its vanity, and shown that the love of it was incompatible with the love of God: he has crucified it more effectually, by his actions and example, from his birth in the sordid manger, to his

death upon the ignominious cross. He commands us to forgive injuries, to love our enemies, to “overcome evil with good.” That he might afford us a model, he suffered the injustice, the persecutions, and the contempt of men. Did not, then, the deep humiliation of Jesus correspond with the intent of his incarnation, and manifest at once his mercy and his wisdom?

Another remark on this part of your Saviour’s history. Learn from Jesus in the manger, the difference between *true* and *false greatness*. To the eye of flesh, how superior was Augustus, seated on the imperial throne, surrounded by the splendour of royalty and the pomp of power, causing, by his edict, all Judea to come and declare their subjection to him; to the son of Mary, who, in consequence of this edict, is born in a stable at Bethlehem! Whilst the world resounded with the name of Augustus, whilst poets and orators celebrated his praises, and kings and people trembled at his power, the infant Jesus was viewed with indifference or contempt. Yet this despised infant is “he in whom all the nations of the earth shall be blest;” he who “brings to light life and immortality;” gives happiness to his children on earth, and enables them to triumph over the tomb. He is born to rule; he will subdue the kings in his anger, and “of his dominion there shall be no end.” Before his sovereign glory and authority, all earthly pomp and power shall vanish as a shadow and a dream. Ah! what has now become of the dignity of Augustus? His throne has long since crumbled to ruins, his sceptre has been broken, his crown has lost its lustre. On his mouldering body corruption has long since preyed. His soul has stood at that tribunal where princes and slaves are equal, and has seen

that salvation can flow only through the merits and mediation of Him who became incarnate at Bethlehem! Whilst the name and the dominion of Jesus has spread from country to country, and his cross is still extending his triumphs, thousands and tens of thousands have subjected their souls unto him, have blessed and adored him during their lives, and with rapture have pronounced his name and triumphed in his perfections in the agonies of death. Unnumbered myriads have experienced the saving efficacy of his blood; and every day and every hour multitudes are ascending to glory from the remotest corners of the globe, to swell the chorus of heaven in his praise. Ah! how little is earthly grandeur when compared with spiritual.

Though man was silent at the birth of the Saviour, the inhabitants of heaven announced to the world the precious benefit which had been conferred upon it. In the same fields, and perhaps in the very same spot in which David, under the canopy of heaven, and in the silence of the night, enjoyed delicious intercourse with the Lord and his angels; in which he composed and sang many of those delightful psalms which still cheer and animate the souls of believers; in which, smitten by a prophetic ray, he looked down the long current of years, beheld Messiah, his son and yet his Lord, ushered into the world, and with rapture announced his future advent;—in these very fields, consecrated by the prayers and praises, the prophetic views and holy joys of David, were some shepherds sitting by night, guarding their flocks, and meditating on the works of the Creator, when an angel, surrounded with light, descended to bring them the welcome tidings that the Saviour had appeared on earth, whose distant approach David.

when engaged in the same occupations with them, had hailed with so much joy. The presence of the angel filled them with apprehension; for since the apostacy of man the presence and the voice of God and his angels, instead of inspiring us with joy, fills us with terror. Until we have peace with God, we fear on beholding the heavenly host, that they are sent on that message of death and malediction which our conscience tells us that we have deserved. Even to the children of God, these supernatural appearances have something terrible. Zechariah feared at the view of the angel; and Mary herself was troubled when Gabriel appeared. The angel, perceiving their fright, hastens to comfort them. "*Fear not,*" he exclaims, I come not the messenger of wrath and indignation to you; "*for, behold I bring you good tidings:*" I, an angel sent from God, that by the dignity of my nature I might attest the importance of my message, and by the veracity of my character secure your assent to my testimony: I come with news worthy an angel's mouth, and becoming a descent from heaven. "*I bring you good tidings of joy:*" not merely some cold, philosophical instructions, to gratify your curiosity and amuse your reason; but such as are calculated to awaken and interest all your feelings, and to inspire you with the most exalted satisfaction. "*All people*" are interested in these tidings, for they lay the foundation of happiness to all the world. All mankind is interested in knowing, that "*unto you,*" men, and not for the angelic race, who were passed by without proffers of mercy: unto you, shepherds, how lowly and poor soever your situation in life may be, is born, "*this day is born,*" the promised and long expected "*Saviour Christ.*" the anointed of God, "*the Lord*" of all things.

Such was the consolatory message of the angel to the shepherds. It banished all their apprehensions; it filled them with rapture. Their hearts burning with gratitude to God, were prepared to unite with the multitude of the heavenly host, that suddenly elevated that hymn of praise to the great Eternal, "Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men." No sooner had the angels departed, than the happy shepherds hastened to behold him whom "so many prophets and kings had desired to see, and had not seen." Having found him, they returned, praising and glorifying God.

My brethren, this relation is far from being the only one which shows us how deeply interested the blessed angels feel in the salvation of the world by Jesus Christ. But if they who were perfectly happy in the enjoyment of God, who had no need of the incarnation and atonement of the Saviour, so admired and celebrated the grace of God in giving his Son for mortals; with what burning gratitude, in what elevated strains, should mortals, who, without the advent of this Redeemer, must have sunk for ever under the wrath of God, bless the Lord for this astonishing display of divine compassion. Come then, my brethren, let us meditate for a few moments on the words of the angel; they present a subject of contemplation at all times useful to Christians, and especially suited to the season of the year in which we now are.

1. Consider *the situation into which sin had brought our race*, and then say whether better tidings could ever be communicated to mortals than that Christ was born. We had rebelled against God; we were exposed to eternal torments; no arm of flesh could save us; the mightiest angel of heaven could not



have atoned for the smallest of our sins; unless the Son of God assumed our nature, to expiate for our sins, there could be no bound to our misery except eternity. With what raptures of joy then must we hear that this Almighty Saviour has come into our world; with what fervour should every mortal tongue shout, “Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!”

2. Consider how illustriously this birth *displays the love of God to man*, and you will acknowledge it to be good tidings of great joy. Well might the angels sing, “Good will to man;” well might John cry, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son to us, and sent him into the world that we might live through him.” How will this enliven our devotions and animate our prayers. By the gift of Jesus we are assured that we go to a God who loves the children of men, and is ready to bestow upon them what they need. No mercy is now too great for us to ask, no blessing too precious for us to expect from God.

3. Consider *the blessings* which Christ brings with him; and then say whether his birth is not tidings of great joy. He comes loaded with heavenly gifts and celestial benedictions; with every thing that is requisite to secure our felicity, or save us from wo. By him our ignorance concerning God and our dearest interests is dispelled, and the treasures of divine wisdom opened to us. By him the Holy Spirit is procured to deliver us from the dominion, and an expiation made to save us from the guilt, of sin. By him heaven is purchased for his followers, and the flames that were kindling around them for ever quenched. He brings with him, in que word, (for

the enumeration of particulars would be endless,) all that God has most precious; he offers us God himself, as the adequate and eternal portion of our souls.

Surely then we must rejoice at this birth of our Saviour. Simeon, Zachariah, the shepherds, all to whom it was announced, shouted the praises of God. The prophets, who beheld it but at a distance, predicted it with transport and ecstasy. The angels descended from heaven to felicitate the earth upon it, and to celebrate it by their songs. The blessed inhabitants of heaven, in the midst of the ravishing objects which surround them, shouted forth their praises and acclamations to the eternal Son that became incarnate. Whilst all nature is thus affected, shall we remain cold and insensible? No: let our hearts expand with joy, and unfeignedly praise the Father of mercies, who has given a Saviour to the world, a King to the church, a Protector and Friend to all that call upon him.

But it is not sufficient for us merely to indulge the emotions of joy on this event. We should also diligently and perseveringly *strive to secure an interest in this Redeemer*. Though he offers salvation to all mankind, yet many thousands shall perish for having neglected him; they shall perish under accumulated guilt; they shall sink down in deeper perdition, for having added to their crimes, against the light and law of nature, the rejection of an offered Jesus. And shall this be the case with any of you, my brethren? Though you have heard of the birth of a Saviour, will you live and die without any right to him, any interest in him? If so, wo to you that ever you were born! Wo to you that Jesus ever became incarnate! Wo to you that your lot had not been cast among

the benighted Pagans, on whom this Sun of righteousness never shone! But "I hope better things of you, and things which accompany salvation." Imitate the shepherds: they no sooner heard these welcome tidings, than they hastened to Bethlehem to find Christ. To Bethlehem you need not go; this Saviour "is not far from every one of us:" in every country, and in every part of the world, he will be found by those who seek him. Desist not then from seeking him, till you can use to him the appropriating language of Thomas, "My Lord and my God:" till you can say with humble confidence, 'for me he was born, for me he died, for me he intercedes; and when I leave this world, more happy than the shepherds I shall behold him, not in the manger of Bethlehem, but in the kingdom of glory, on the throne of the universe.'

Let the birth of Christ lead us to *abandon and detest every sin*. He came into the world to teach us "to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." To continue therefore in the allowed practice of any sin, is now not only a disobedience to our great Creator, but also a contempt of the mercy and compassion of a kind and generous Saviour; a base requital of the Son of God; an ingratitude which shall not escape the punishment of the Almighty.

Finally: let the humble circumstances in which Christ was born inspire us with humility, a contempt of the world, and a superiority to it. Disciples of Jesus! we are required to resemble him, not always I acknowledge in our situation, but in our mind, our inclinations, and sentiments. There may be true Christians who are rich and powerful; who have not therefore a conformity of situation with Jesus Christ

in poverty, and laid in a manger. But in every state we cannot be Christians without being humble and poor in spirit; without a true superiority to the world, to its false glory, its vain pomp, and its frivolous pleasures. It is permitted us to acquire, to possess, and to enjoy earthly blessings; but it is not permitted us to consecrate to this acquisition and enjoyment all our time, all our thoughts, all our faculties; nor to put our trust in them; nor to give our heart to them; nor to sacrifice our duty for them. Jesus, despising them in his incarnation, teaches us to enjoy them without being slaves to them; to possess them without fixing our warmest affections on them; to be ready to renounce them at the call of duty. Worldlings! this doctrine and this example are not calculated to affect you. You have not a mind sufficiently elevated to admire them, or a heart sufficiently noble to feel their excellence. You have but one desire and occupation;—that of accumulating earthly blessings. What can you behold in the stable at Bethlehem? the image of that poverty which is the object of your contempt; the example of humility, of disinterestedness, of the renunciation of that world which is your idol. But you, sincere believers, do you approach the humble manger to contemplate there a Saviour who lived in this world to teach you to despise it, and to elevate your hearts and your hopes to real blessings. Fix your views and your desires on those eternal blessings; forget not that you are strangers and pilgrims; be neither dazzled by the splendours, nor terrified by the pains; trace the footsteps of the humble Jesus, they will conduct you to glory infinite and immortal.

## SERMON XXXVI.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. III.



JESUS IN THE ARMS OF SIMEON.

LUKE ii. 22—35.

FOR four hundred years before the birth of Christ, the gift of prophecy had ceased among the Jews. At the period of his advent it was revived, and bestowed, among others, upon Simeon. The character and declarations of this pious person come now to be considered in the prosecution of our Saviour's life.

Among the plagues which God inflicted on the people of Egypt, to compel them to liberate the Israelites, the last and the greatest was the destruction of the first-born of every family, from that of the imperial Pharaoh to that of the meanest of his subjects. In commemoration of this event, and of the deliverance then experienced by the Israelites, God claimed the first-born as peculiarly his own, in succeeding generations, and commanded that they should solemnly be presented to him in the temple, as an acknowledgment of his right in them, and that

the price of their redemption should there be paid. To comply with this ordinance, and to make the sacrifices required for her legal purification, Mary went up from Bethlehem, where she had probably remained since the birth of the Saviour, and carried him to the temple. She there, according to the law, offered two doves, the one for a sin-offering, and the other for a burnt-offering; and having waited in the outer court till this service was performed, entered into the temple.

There was then at Jerusalem, Simeon, a man venerable for his years, but still more venerable for his piety, who had long been "waiting for the *consolation of Israel*;" an expression applied by the scriptures, and the Jewish writers, to the Messiah. We shall not stop to inquire whether, according to the opinion of some commentators, he was Simeon, surnamed the Just, one of the grand synagogues, and so celebrated in the annals of the Jews; or, according to others, Simeon the son of Hillel, president of the great sanhedrim, and father of that Gamaliel of whom St. Paul was the disciple. We know nothing of him, except from this portion of the sacred history. We cannot tell whether he was dignified by his rank and birth; but we know that he was great and dignified from his virtues. "He was," says the Evangelist, "just and devout;" an eulogium which renders him more worthy of our reverence than the highest offices, and the most illustrious descent. "*The Holy Ghost was upon him*;" i. e. he was favoured by immediate revelations from God, and had the spirit of prophecy conferred upon him. By this spirit he was assured that he should not see death till he had beheld that Messiah for whom he, like every faithful Israelite, looked with so much ardour. Sustained by this as-

surance, he joyfully saw those days passing away, the end of which was to be crowned by the accomplishment of all his wishes. By the inspiration of the Spirit he went to the temple just as the Son of God made his first entrance into it. By the same inspiration he recognised him as the Messiah; and immediately folding the holy infant in his aged arms, offers to God the first-fruits of those immortal praises, which all believers shall for ever render to him for the birth of a Saviour.

“Lord,” exclaims he, in the fervours of holy transport and joy, “*now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*” Who can describe the emotions of Simeon as he uttered these impressive words? He sees before him, he touches, he holds in his arms, that Messiah whom so many prophets, and righteous men, so many kings, and patriarchs, have in vain longed to behold. He sees the accomplishment of those promises, which Abraham, and Jacob, and Moses, and so many other believers, under the former dispensation, had beheld only afar off.

If Abraham, the most illustrious of his ancestors, seeing by faith at the distance of many centuries, the advent of the Saviour, leaped for joy, what must be the transports of Simeon, who contemplates him present. Imagine to yourselves what would have been the joy of a faithful Israelite, if after contemplating the cruel servitude of his people to the Egyptians, he had seen Moses born, and been assured that he would be the deliverer of Israel. If after having trembled for his life, if after having seen him exposed upon the Nile in the floating cradle, which a tender and ingenious mother had prepared for him, he had beheld the daughter of Pharaoh adopting

it, and sheltering it from danger, would not his joy have been unutterable? Simeon's was as much greater as the Son of God was superior to Moses, as an eternal salvation to a temporal deliverance.

No wonder that after this exalted privilege, he was ready to depart from earth; no wonder that after fixing his eyes upon Jesus, he was ready to close them upon all other objects. Every thing terrestrial must now appear to him of little consequence. Let Herod reign peaceably on the throne of Judea, or let him be precipitated from it; let Augustus execute his ambitious projects, or let them be blasted; let the Roman empire flourish, or decay; what is all this to Simeon, after he has seen the salvation of God. The rising of the Sun of Righteousness was the signal of his departure. He has beheld its beams. He dies content, and his gray hairs descend with pleasure to the tomb. "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

Another consideration inspires Simeon with this willingness to die. He beholds in this Saviour the firmest foundation of his faith, the infallible proof of an immortal life. He holds in his arms the precious pledge of eternal felicity for the pious. Anticipating the sacrifice of the cross, he sees in this Jesus him who is to seal the divine promises with his blood, and give all believers an assurance of the unspeakable happiness of the soul, and the glorious resurrection of the body. Simeon has seen the salvation of God. Can the world then, into which he is about to enter, have for him any of that gloom which renders an approach to it so terrible to the greater part of mortals. Since "the day-spring from on high" has visited him, he beholds a way opened even into the holiest. Since the King of glory has descended



from on high, to dwell among men, the eternal gates must be opened, the everlasting doors must be lifted up, to let in the believing soul.

Simeon has seen the salvation of God. Can he then be afflicted at remembering that his body will be laid in the tomb, and serve as food for worms? No; he can say in a far more energetic manner than Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God;" when at the general resurrection he shall re-appear to judge the world. Yes, these same eyes with which I have seen the Saviour on his entrance upon earth; these same eyes which have discerned him through the infirmities of childhood, will contemplate him hereafter in heaven, in the midst of his splendour and glory.

These were then the sources of that joy and peace which attended the last moments of this holy man: an indifference for the objects of earth, and an assured hope of an eternal felicity. These prompted that beautiful exclamation which we cannot too much admire, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

Such were the sentiments and emotions of Simeon, on beholding the Saviour. But in contemplating Jesus, his mind does not rest merely on his *person*; it fixes also on that *salvation* which he came to procure for man: "*I have seen thy salvation.*" The veil which covers the future is for him drawn aside; and, illumined by a heavenly light, he already contemplates all the grandeurs of the Redeemer's ministry, and all the blessings which he brings into the world. Hitherto the church of God had been confined to a

single nation; he beholds it now extending its borders, and embracing all the earth; he sees the Sun of righteousness rising upon those nations that had hitherto sat in darkness and the shadow of death, and dispelling by its rays the clouds of ignorance, of delusion, and superstition. “*Mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles.*” You immediately perceive that the word *light* is here used in a metaphorical sense, and that Christ is thus termed, because he diffuses the most important knowledge and instruction through the gentile world. This is a mode of speaking common to all languages, since all mankind have felt that what *light* is to the eye, *that knowledge* is to the mind.

Did our time permit, it would be easy to show you in detail the fulfilment of this prediction, and the propriety of the application of this term to our Saviour. But the limits prescribed to these exercises forbid a full elucidation of a subject so calculated to teach you your obligations to Jesus. Let your own meditations supply what I am unwillingly constrained to omit. The task is not difficult. You have only to transport yourselves in imagination to those dark ages which preceded the advent of Christ, and the publication of his gospel. You have only to recall to your minds what you have heard, or what your reading has taught you, of those cruel, impure, and abominable worships of those pretended gods, who were black with every crime; of those false systems of religion which were every where introduced, which prevailed in the most polished as well as the most savage nations. Represent to yourselves the unhappy posterity of Adam, with the exception only of one small nation, even among whom the know-

ledge of the true God, and of his salvation, was comparatively obscure and superficial. Represent to yourselves all the posterity of our great progenitor in the deepest ignorance on all the great points of religion and morality, overwhelmed with a deluge of errors and superstitions, worshipping every object in nature except the great Creator; regarding as deities all the productions of the earth, its plants, its beasts, its reptiles; all the luminaries of the heavens: all the passions and crimes of men. Imagine what must have been the situation of these blind men, who knew not whence they came, nor why God called them into being, nor the manner in which they could acceptably adore him, nor what awaited them after death; who in vain sought instruction on all these points from their sages, their philosophers. Recall to yourselves those barbarous sacrifices to which these unhappy persons had recourse to appease their cruel divinities, in which even the life and the blood of their own children were not spared. Represent to yourselves what must have been their anguish at the approach of death, when their soul was filled with terror, on entering into a dark, and unknown future; or agitated with remorse at the remembrance of its crimes; crimes for which it beheld no atoning blood, no expiating Saviour.

After having thus gone back to these dark ages, return to yourselves. Feel how different is your condition from that of these unfortunate men. Consider attentively the beauty of your religion, the sublimity of its doctrines, the purity of its morality, the greatness of its promises, the eternal salvation which it announces, the worship so simple, and yet so reasonable, which it requires us to render to the Divinity. Recall to your remembrance those hopes, those

consolations, which you have heard given to the dying, and in which you desire one day to participate. Do more, my brethren; transport yourselves in imagination to the paradise of God. Assemble all those dispersed traits which the scriptures employ, to paint to us the glories of the third heaven; the felicities, the delights which God destines to his children, and his friends.

Having made this examination, put to yourselves that question which naturally presents itself: whence were derived all these great truths, all this interesting knowledge? Whence is it that we know more concerning God, our relations to him, our duty and destination, than the wisest philosophers of antiquity did? To whom are we indebted for those doctrines, those precepts, those consolations, those promises, which compose our religion? Is it not to Jesus Christ? Alas! without him we should never have had proper thoughts of God; we should never have known his grace, his compassion towards men, and the end for which he has destined us. We should never have known how to obtain the forgiveness of our sins, nor how to worship him aright. We should have been bowing down to stocks, and to stones, and have "had our understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in us." But, by Jesus Christ, we have been "translated from the kingdom of darkness to that of his marvellous light." We have been instructed in every thing necessary for our duty, and happiness here, and our felicity hereafter. Shall we not then, with Simeon, magnify the Lord for giving us a Saviour, who has indeed been "*a light to lighten the gentiles?*"

As the pagan world received such blessings from the advent of Messiah, so also did this event confer lustre on the Jewish nation. This Jesus, who is "a light to lighten the gentiles," is also, proceeds the inspired Simeon, "*the glory of his people Israel.*" It was glorious to the Jews that the Saviour of mankind was born in their nation. This circumstance is mentioned to their honour by St. Paul: "Whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came." (Rom. ix. 5.) In Judea rose that king, who is infinitely more illustrious than the most powerful earthly monarch who ever lived; whose dominions extend far beyond the conquests of the greatest heroes of the world; whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; whose name is pronounced with rapture; whose authority is cheerfully acknowledged by every one of his unnumbered subjects. Was it not an honour to the Jews to have such a king born in the midst of them, and going forth from them, to subdue the world? In Judea rose that Jesus who has conferred blessings upon mankind, infinitely greater than the combined benefits of all the benevolent mortals who have ever lived; who has redeemed our race from misery unutterable; to whom "the blessings of thousands that were ready to perish," rise every day, and every hour, from the remotest corners of the earth, and on whom myriads of the redeemed perpetually gaze, with ever-increasing devotion and love. Was it not a glory to the Jews to have such a benefactor of mankind born among them?

Simeon having thus declared the happy effects of the Saviour's mediation, blessed Joseph and Mary. Being a prophet, and full of the Holy Ghost, he discharged that sacerdotal and prophetic office, to

pray for them, and give them his benediction. In this respect he acted as their superior, since, according to the maxim of St. Paul, The lesser is blessed by the greater. According to this same maxim, when he took up the child Jesus in his arms, he did not bless him by whom he himself was to be blessed, and whom he knew to be his Lord and Saviour, though concealed under the weakness of infancy; but addressing himself to Mary, he, in the prophetic language, predicts what should befall both the child and herself. "*He said unto Mary, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also.*"

How perfectly was this prediction of Simeon accomplished. Though Jesus came into the world, that the world by him might be saved; though his life was pure, and innocent, and spotless, yet does not his whole history prove, that he was a sign spoken against? Was he not perpetually exposed to contradiction and reproach, to censure and calumny, to malice and cruelty? Was he not the innocent occasion of the falling of multitudes, who were scandalized at his person and doctrine, who preferred darkness to light, and sin to righteousness, unbelief to faith, and obstinacy to repentance? Was he not opposed by all classes of persons, on all occasions, in the most virulent manner? Does not the whole evangelical history prove to us, that to persons who were worldly-minded, and had no relish for spiritual things, which was the case with the generality of the Jews, he was a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence; because their prejudices obstructed the reception of his pure and holy doctrine, and of his spi-

ritual kingdom, so different from that which they had expected?

But if he was thus set for the fall of many who took offence at him, and perished under a more aggravated condemnation for their rejection of him, he was also the means of causing many to rise from guilt, from misery, and despair. During his abode on earth, numbers crowded to him, and hailed him as their Saviour. Whilst his blood still smoked upon Calvary, myriads, under the preaching of the apostles, rose from a death of sin to a life of righteousness. This effect is still carrying on in the world; and every day, through the influence of his cross, numbers are rising up from the thralldom of Satan, to the liberty of the sons of God, or ascending from earth to the regions of felicity.

In consequence of this different effect produced upon different persons, "the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed;" i. e. it would manifestly appear who had honest and religious dispositions, and would receive the gospel with sincerity and gratitude; and who, through the hardness of their hearts and their corrupt affections, would reject the offers of salvation.

Simeon, in conclusion, declares to the virgin mother, that she shall participate in the afflictions of Jesus: "*Yea, a sword shall pierce thine own soul also.*" This prediction was in a degree accomplished, whenever she witnessed the sufferings of the Redeemer. It was emphatically fulfilled when she stood by his cross. Who can describe the agonies which she then endured? They are indescribable. Tender and affectionate mothers, you alone can form any conception of them! Is there in this assembly a widowed mother, whose love is concentrated on an

only son ; a son who is worthy of all her affection, who is her only support and resource, and for whom she flatters herself a high distinction in life is reserved? Is there such a mother present? To her I speak. Think what would be your anguish if this son were to be torn from you by a premature death, and all your joys and hopes interred in his tomb! Go further. Suppose this your son should expire in ignominy, loaded with the public execration, and that you were obliged to behold this beloved object, livid, motionless, bloody, accursed! Could you support such a spectacle? Nevertheless, this would be ecstasy, compared to the griefs which wrung the heart of Mary. She beholds him to whom nature and grace had united to attach her; her son, and yet her Lord, the consolation of Israel, and her chief joy; him whose birth was announced by an angel, whose incarnation was hailed with rapture by the heavenly host; whose divine wisdom, whose sublime consolations, whose kind cares, had cheered her in every situation in life,—now struggling with the pangs of death, and about to leave her desolate and forsaken! Her grief would be mitigated, could she be permitted to approach him, to pluck the thorns from his temple, to staunch the precious blood which flows from his wounds, to support his sinking head, and receive his last breath! But even this sad consolation is denied her. She can only behold his agonies, without being able to alleviate them; listen to his groans, without being able to suspend them; hear the execrations and scoffs of his murderers, without being able to silence them! Holy Simeon, thy prophecy is now fulfilled, and a sword pierces through her soul!



From the many inferences naturally resulting from this discourse, we can select only a few.

1. Let us all be led to imitate the example of Simeon, and acquire a perfect willingness to meet death whenever God shall appoint; so that when we are called to leave this world, we may not be constrained to cry out, like the majority of mankind, "O spare me, that I may recover strength before I go hence, and be no more!" but may exclaim, with all the calmness and peace of Simeon, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

If we acquire not this temper, we cannot be happy. If our felicity consists in an abode in the body, (an abode which we know can continue but a little time, and cannot be perpetuated a moment by our most ardent wishes,) must we not be agitated by painful fears and apprehensions? If our happiness is bound up in what we cannot retain; if we are in continual dread of what we cannot avoid; if we are engaged in a contest with necessity, in which we must be vanquished; if, when we know that our souls must be required of us, we will not prepare freely to relinquish them, rather than have them reluctantly dragged from us, are we not unwise? Do we not shudder at our situation, if it be true with regard to any of us, (and it is true with regard to most of us,) that the presence of the Lord, the highest hope and joy of all the pious, is for us the supreme object of dread; and yet that we have no better fortress to hide ourselves from this presence than this body of clay, which he can so easily beat down, and leave us naked and defenceless? Let us flee instantly from this perilous and unhappy state. Let us become reconciled to the grave, and obtain a victory over the dread of death. Then, not fearing death, we

need fear nothing. Whenever God calls us we may answer, "Lord, *now*, this instant, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

Do you say, Had I like Simeon beheld the Saviour, I should have had his dispositions? Deceive not yourselves; your advantages are not only equal to, they are even greater than those of Simeon. He beheld, it is true, the infant Saviour; but you have known not only his birth, but his life, his miracles, his instructions: he has been exhibited to you dying, rising from the tomb, ascending to the highest heaven, and shedding down his Holy Spirit. You have seen him breaking with a rod of iron the enemies who opposed his empire; preserving his church from age to age in the midst of the tempests which earth and hell have raised against it; and fulfilling in every period his promises to his people. Ah! my brethren, they are not the peculiar privileges of Simeon that we need, but his piety, his religious heart, his detachment from the world. Instead of imitating this holy man, in removing our eyes from the world which is flying from us, and fixing them on that eternity which approaches, we lay hold on the earth with our strongest passions. We ought to be attached to the world only by our *duties*, we are so by our most ardent *hopes* and *desires*. Like Simeon, let salvation be our chief concern; then we shall die in peace, and eternity will offer to us objects infinitely more interesting than those which we can behold below.

2. Christ is a "*light to lighten the Gentiles.*" Let us *rejoice* in this light, and *be thankful* for it. What a privilege have we in being surrounded by it above those nations who lived before his appearance, and above many people who still sit in "darkness and the shadow of death?" For this distinguished and

undeserved privilege, should not our hearts swell with gratitude to God? To gratitude add a *proper improvement* of it. If while it shines around us, it shines not in our hearts, and has no enlightening, transforming influence upon them, it will only increase our guilt and condemnation. We shall in the day of judgment envy the lot of those pagans, who to their sins against the law of nature have not added a rejection of the gospel, and a neglect of the covenant of grace. We shall see that our condemnation is just, if “when light has come into the world, we have chosen darkness rather than light.” Let us then, according to the exhortation of the apostle, “walk as the children of the light and of the day, not of the night or of darkness.” Let us *pity* and *pray* for those who have not this light, and use every exertion in our power that it may be diffused among them. Let us lift up our supplications for the unhappy posterity of Abraham, from whom the glory is quite departed; let us beseech God to hasten the time when “all Israel shall be saved,” and when “the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in.” With the warmest gratitude for our own privileges, let the tenderest charity for others be mingled.

3. Through the Saviour “the thoughts of men’s hearts were to be revealed.” Has this effect been produced upon us? Have we gained a knowledge of our state and character from the preaching of Christ? His gospel has often been presented to us: what discoveries has it made? Has it convinced us of the corruption of our nature, of our natural opposition to God and holiness, of our perishing need of the divine grace, and of the atonement of Jesus? If it has not taught us these and similar lessons, it has been of no avail to us. What effect has the preaching of Christ

produced upon our lives? We must either rise or fall by means of his gospel. Are we then risen through Christ to a new and heavenly life, or are we filled with prejudice against his church and people? If he has proved a "stone of stumbling and a rock of offence" to us, we may well tremble; but if we by him have risen to holiness, we shall shortly rise to eternal glory.

4. Finally, let us learn from the sufferings of Mary to bear with patience those lighter afflictions with which God visits us. Behold the Virgin mother while a sword pierces through her soul, all those of you who are repining at your calamities; who are exclaiming, that you could have borne any other sorrows better than those which have befallen you; who are suffering imagination to magnify your little griefs, till they appear to your prejudiced eye greater than any which have been experienced by mortals. Behold the woes of Mary, and instead of murmuring, bless God who has spared you so many miseries which were felt by one so far exalted above you in piety and devotion.

## SERMON XXXVII.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. IV.



ANNA—THE MAGI—FLIGHT INTO EGYPT—SLAUGHTER  
OF THE INNOCENTS.

LUKE ii. 36—39. MATTHEW ii.

WE have beheld the incarnation of Jesus celebrated with rapture by the heavenly host. We have followed the adoring shepherds to the manger at Bethlehem; and have contemplated the venerable Simeon pouring out his thanksgivings to God for the gift of a Saviour, and contented now that he has folded “the Lord’s Christ” in his aged arms, to drop into the tomb. But these were not the only persons who beheld the new-born Saviour with wonder, gratitude, and joy. Other lips pronounced his praises; other hearts beat high with love, and were filled with veneration towards him. Of these Anna and the magi are particularly mentioned by the sacred writers. Hitherto since the birth of the Saviour, we have heard him celebrated only by *men*, and those *men Jews*. To show that both sexes were alike in-

terested in him, and had equal cause to rejoice in his advent, Anna, a female, and the magi, who were Gentiles, mingle their voices with the others, and express their firm trust in him, their ardent love for him.

The account that is given us of *Anna* is most brief. She was now full of years, and had long lived in a state of widowhood, having been bereft of her husband while young. In her affliction she sought consolation, where alone it can be found, in the service of God and in the offices of religion. “*She was a widow of fourscore and four years,\* who departed not from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayer night and day.*” Imitate her example, Christian, from whose arms death has torn the objects which possessed and deserved your affection. Seek that support, that comfort which you need, not in the inefficacious condolences of earthly friends, not in the unsatisfactory enjoyments of the world, not in the powerless precepts of human philosophy: but by pouring out your cares in the bosom of your heavenly Father, and by diligently attending to the duties of piety. Thus only can the wounds of your heart be healed; thus will you be rendered happy from finding in your divine friend infinitely warmer love and greater blessings than in those for whose loss you have wept.

This happiness was possessed by Anna; it was, however, consummated when, entering into the temple at the time the Saviour was in the arms of Simeon, she beheld in this Messiah the object of her faith, the accomplishment of the promises, the Redeemer of the world. Penetrated with adoring gratitude,

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\* *Van Til* supposes, contrary to the general supposition, that she had been a widow for eighty-four years, and that she constantly resided in the temple.—Vide his “*Homilia Tima in Infantiam Christi.*”

she gave thanks aloud to God, and “*spake of him,*” adds the Evangelist, “*to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*” Beautiful example for you, aged and pious females. Think it not enough that you yourselves have beheld the Saviour; speak of his excellences to others, declare to them the faithfulness of God in fulfilling his promises to his people, and endeavour to excite their confidence, their love, and devotion.

Having thus presented Jesus in the temple, and performed all that was required by the law of the Lord, Joseph, Mary, and the Saviour, returned to Nazareth. They continued here, however, but a short time, before they returned to Bethlehem, where they were found by the wise men of the east, who came heaven-directed to prostrate themselves before Messiah.\*

It is uncertain from what particular country these *wise men* or *magi* (as they are more properly termed) came. The scriptures merely tell us that they came *from the east*. It is the most common and most probable opinion that they were from Persia. Among this people the magi principally flourished, and their very name is of Persian origin. They were a class of men who devoted themselves to religion and the study of nature, particularly of astronomy. They were austere in their habits, and pure in their morals. They were the instructors of the royal family; and to them was committed the superintendence of the public religion. I have before shown you, that at the time of the birth of Jesus, all the east was

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\* There is some difficulty in fixing *the time* of the coming of the magi. I have followed the order of events laid down by Macknight and Beausobre--whom see.

anxiously looking for some great personage, who should arise to give happiness to the nations. This expectation probably owed its original to the Jews, who, being dispersed through the east in their several captivities, spread the knowledge of their prophecies, as well as of their religion, among the various people with whom they associated. In addition to this general expectation, in which the magi participated, there was one circumstance which would render their desires more strong. Zoroaster, the chief reformer of the magian discipline and religion, was the servant of the prophet Daniel, to whom particular revelations were made concerning the time of the advent of Messiah. Probably he communicated to his disciples more definite information concerning the period when the Redeemer should appear, and the country where he should be born, than was possessed by the rest of the Gentiles. No wonder then that when they were informed of his birth, they hastened to Judea.

The appearance of a new star first excited their attention. When arrived at Jerusalem, they inquire. "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for *we have seen his star in the East.*" What was this star? Different opinions have been entertained. It evidently could not have been an ordinary star; its motion differed from the apparent motion of any of these; it appeared in the day-time; it was lower; and its light was more intense. It was then a luminous body, created by the divine power to direct the steps of the magi: to serve the same purposes to them as the pillar of fire and cloud did to the Israelites, when wandering in the desert. It is here called *a star*, in conformity with the custom of all languages, which give this name to meteors formed in the air,



and resembling the real stars in their lustre and appearance. Thus among us, nothing is more common than to speak of shooting stars.

But how could this appearance announce to the magi that “the King of the Jews was born?” In itself it could not. In addition to it, there was an immediate revelation, informing them what was denoted by this extraordinary appearance which they had observed, and the cause of which they had probably in vain endeavoured to discover. As soon as they are made acquainted with the blessed event which it denotes, and the purpose for which it is destined, they joyfully put themselves under its guidance, and are conducted by it to Jerusalem. There it disappears, in order that the Sanhedrim might give their testimony to the place designated by ancient prophecy for the birth of Messiah. Had it conducted them immediately to Bethlehem, we should not have had the unanimous decision of the Jewish teachers of that age, that Bethlehem was the place fixed by heaven for the nativity of Christ. Deprived of the conducting star, they inquire at Jerusalem, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” They doubtless expected that the great and the learned in this city would immediately be able to inform them. Alas! they were disappointed. These great men of the world were occupied with other cares, were engaged in other pursuits than those that related to Messiah. Had the magi met with the humble shepherds of Bethlehem, they would instantly have given them the information which they sought: but the learned rabbis and scribes were strangers to the birth of their King. How often does the world exhibit similar instances! How often are we constrained to remember those expressive words of our Sa-

viour, " I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes!" How often do we see those who are versed in human science, and like these magi, can trace the progress of the stars, but never, like them, had the felicity to behold the star of Christ!

At the question and information of the magi, "*the king was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*" The trouble of Herod is not astonishing. It is the fear and the rage of a jealous and cruel usurper, who knows that he is hated by the nation whom he governs; who is apprehensive that Providence is about to wrest the sceptre from his sanguinary hands; who already hears Jerusalem and Judea proclaiming the King that is sent to them from heaven.

But why should Jerusalem be troubled? What has it to fear? Ought not the birth of the Prince of Peace and King of Zion to be welcomed by it as the most acceptable tidings? Jerusalem, like other great cities, was composed of different classes of persons. The most distinguished inhabitants were connected with the court, and derived their dignities and riches from Herod. They therefore participated in his trouble, as they must have been sharers in any calamity which befel him. Others, who detested Herod, feared a change. Regarding the Messiah as a temporal deliverer, they supposed that he could not, without the effusion of much blood, rescue them from misery, and tear Herod from the throne. But though such were the feelings of the majority of the people, there were some few more pious and more enlightened, who, like Simeon and Anna, rejoiced in this long expected event.

The tyrant, who was most deeply interested, carefully concealed his uneasiness; appeared to listen to the magi with satisfaction, and showed them every mark of outward respect. That he might answer their question, he “gathered together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, and asked them where Christ should be born.” “The chief priests were either those who had enjoyed the dignity of the high priesthood, (which had now become elective and temporary,) or the chiefs of the sacerdotal classes, the heads of the courses of priests appointed by David. The scribes were the interpreters of the law, and the public instructors of the nation. All these, illustrious for their learning, were consulted on this occasion.”\* “Though the star had disappeared,” says good Bishop Hall, “yet there is a perpetually fixed star shining in the writings of the prophets, that guided the chief priests and scribes directly to Bethlehem.”

Herod, having thus found the place assigned by the prophets for the birth of the Saviour, resolved to destroy the infant King. He, however, dissembled his intentions under the cloak of piety; and “calling the magi, privily inquired carefully of them what time the star had appeared, and then sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go, and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.” The wisdom and power of the Divine Providence are here conspicuously manifested in the preservation of the Saviour. Nothing could exceed the ordinary jealousy and suspicion of the character of Herod. Yet he here acts with the utmost careless-

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\* Macknight in loco.

ness. He does not himself accompany the magi, in order to make sure of his intended victim; nor, under the pretence of honouring these illustrious strangers, send a guard to escort them, with secret directions to kill the child. Such conduct would have accorded with his ordinary character. But he was now restrained by the hand of God.

The conduct of the inhabitants of Jerusalem was calculated to assail the faith of the magi. Instead of finding every mouth filled with the praises of this King, whom they had travelled so far to behold, they find almost all the city ignorant of him, and indifferent towards him. The tidings of his birth created no sensation of joy; and no one attends them the small distance from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, there to contemplate him. But, not discouraged by these circumstances, they renew their journey; and God, to reward their unshaken constancy, again lights up before them the star that had guided them from the East. What joy they felt when they beheld its re-appearance, they only can tell, that, after a long and sad night of temptation, have seen the loving countenance of God shining forth upon their souls. Fear not, believers who are going to Jesus. The providence of the Almighty continually watches over you in every step of your long journey. Like these magi, courageously and obediently follow the call of God, and you shall never want light to direct you, or comfort to cheer you.

When they beheld the star, says the Evangelist, "*they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.*" They followed it till it rested over the house where the new-born King was lodged. Though he was no longer in a stable, yet the house in which he resided was certainly infinitely unworthy of its glorious inhabitant.

The magi entered it, however, with far greater reverence than they would have felt in going into the most splendid palace of earth. "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother;" and they "*fell down*" before him, which was the ordinary mode of saluting princes in the East, "and worshipped him." After having rendered to him this honour, they opened their treasures, and presented unto him gold, frankincense, and myrrh. It was the custom in the East, as you must have observed in reading the Old Testament, never to appear before great men without a present, in testimony of the respect borne to them, and of devotedness to their service. The action of the magi is then an acknowledgment of the greatness of Jesus, a demonstration of their zeal for his glory, and of their voluntary subjection to him. Gold, incense, and myrrh, were selected for their present, because they had nothing more precious; but these offerings were accompanied by sentiments of the heart infinitely more acceptable to God. A faith more precious than gold, the incense of praises and thanksgivings, constituted the soul of these oblations.

Thus these learned men proved the first-fruits of the Gentiles. God, by calling them to the knowledge of Jesus, and giving them grace to obey the call, afforded a happy presage of the calling of the Gentiles in general, and their conversion to the Lord.

Piety, like charity, is not suspicious. The magi, having seen and adored the Redeemer, prepared to return to Herod, to give him an account of the success of their journey. "But God warning them in a dream, that they should not return, they went to their own country another way:" and probably, by

the tidings they carried back, prepared their countrymen for the reception of the gospel, and facilitated its progress, when it was afterwards announced to them.

My brethren, we cannot leave this part of our Saviour's history, without presenting these magi as a model to you. Imitate that faith so ardent in desiring to see Christ, so unwearied in seeking him, so happy in finding him, so humble and devout in adoring him. They left their house, and their country, and encountered a thousand perils, that they might behold and worship Jesus. How inexcusable shall we be, if after such an example, we suffer nothing to enjoy his presence, and if we neglect to seek him. They were born and educated in idolatry; while we opened our eyes in a Christian land, and were in our very infancy consecrated to the Lord. They had only an indistinct knowledge of him. They knew only that he was a great king, come for the salvation of the world. To us his whole character and glory is revealed; we have been taught that he was the eternal Son of God, who for our sakes became incarnate; who suffered the curse of the law, to deliver us from it; who died for our redemption; who rose again, and re-ascended into heaven, where he reigns in glory ineffable. They undertook a long and painful journey, to salute the new-born King. "He is not far from every one of us:" in every place we may find him. Surely then, if we neglect the Saviour, they will rise up in judgment against us, and will condemn us.

We return to our history. Whilst Herod is anxiously expecting the return of the magi, God informs Joseph of the sanguinary designs of this tyrant, and commands him to retire speedily into Egypt, with

Mary and the holy infant. “Behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word. for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child, and his mother, by night, and departed into Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod.”

The command was, perhaps, intended as a trial for the faith of Joseph. It was calculated to fill him with surprise. Need the Redeemer of the world fear the wrath and power of Herod, and save himself by flight from him? No, he need not fear, even in his state of apparent weakness, he could in an instant have crushed this tyrant. But the time for Herod to be smitten has not yet come. He has not yet filled up the measure of his iniquity. Besides, it is a beautiful trait in the life of the Saviour, that he never wrought a miracle for himself. With the miseries of others he always sympathized; and where a miracle was required, for the relief of the unhappy, in no one instance did he withhold it. But never did he work one to save himself from those griefs and agonies of which his life was full. And, finally, he came into the world to be “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” He was to be persecuted from the commencement of his life. Like Moses, destined to death, he was rescued from it by means which, though not apparently miraculous, were nevertheless, immediately managed by Providence, for the preservation of his days. “Jesus went into Egypt.” This country had ever been the asylum of the Jewish nation, and its progenitors. Thither Abraham went, when the famine obliged him to leave Canaan. There Joseph rose to the highest dignities, and pre-

pared a place for his brethren, and their posterity. There the children of Israel remained till they were able to conquer the country which God destined for them. And thither they afterwards often went for refuge, when persecuted in their own land. There also the Son of God, persecuted by Herod, went, to remain till the death of that tyrant.

By this residence in Egypt, says the Evangelist, "that saying of the prophet was fulfilled, *Out of Egypt have I called my Son.*" This prophecy is to be found Hos. xi. 1. and seems to have been originally spoken of the Israelites. But, in consequence of the afflictions which the Jews suffered in that country, *the bringing of the people into Egypt* became a proverb among them, to signify an exposure to hardships and sorrows. Thus the threatening in Deut. xxviii. 68. that the Israelites should be sent back again into Egypt, was fulfilled by their captivities in Assyria and Babylon. And on the other hand, any singular interposition of Providence in behalf of a person, or nation was, for the same reason, called *a bringing of them out of Egypt*. Thus the return of the Jews from Assyria and Babylon, is represented by the prophet Zechariah (x. 10.) as *bringing them out of Egypt*; and, lest his meaning should be mistaken, he adds, "*I will gather them out of Assyria.*" Christ then, being delivered from the power of Herod, by a message from heaven, and the immediate interposition of God, the Evangelist properly applies to this event the proverbial saying, "Out of Egypt have I called my Son."

Herod, having waited impatiently for the return of the magi, discovered, at length, that they had returned to their own country. He was immediately inflamed with the most violent rage. Inured as he



had been to murder, having dipped his hands in the blood of his kings, of his sons, and of his wife, he consummates his guilt, by an act of barbarity still more atrocious. "He sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and all the coasts thereof, from two years old, and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men," trusting that the new-born King would be included in the general massacre. The inhumanity of this action is better felt than described. They are children, whose weakness, and innocence have often disarmed the most ferocious enemy. They are children, whose parents bear, without murmuring, the yoke of this tyrant, and are guilty of no other crime than of dwelling in the city of David. They are a vast number, even if the order had been literally executed. But, its execution is committed to a brutal soldiery, who, having no marks to distinguish the precise age of the children, probably exceeded their commands, in numberless instances.

Mothers, it is for you only to conceive the tears which this horrible transaction excited; the shrieks, the despair which it caused in Bethlehem! If the affliction was less general in the massacre at Bethlehem, it was more affecting and more cruel. What agony for the parents to see their infants slain in their arms; to behold their convulsive struggles with death; to listen to their groans, and to catch the last look of their closing eye, imploring, ah! vainly imploring relief. Surely, if any thing could re-animate the ashes of Rachel, who was buried in these very fields of Bethlehem, she would now rise to lament these little ones, who lie slaughtered in heaps around her.

Shortly after this barbarous action Herod died. Nothing can exceed the sufferings that he underwent before he expired. The description of his agonies, that is given us by profane historians, cannot be read without shuddering. But his heart was still unchanged. One of his last acts was to cause his son, Antipater, to be killed; and rightly supposing that the Jewish people would rejoice at his death, he put in prison all the principal men of the nation, ordering his sister, Salome, to have them slain when he was at the point of death, that his life might be desired, and his decease lamented, with deep and universal sorrow. But the unrighteous designs of Herod were frustrated. On his decease, his sister, no longer apprehensive of him, released the prisoners, and the day of his death was a day of universal joy. His soul ascended to the bar of God, to meet there the murdered infants of Bethlehem, and to receive its irreversible sentence.

On this event, the angel of the Lord ordered Joseph to return. He obeyed, and would willingly have gone into Judea, but was deterred by the cruel and jealous disposition of Archelaus, who then reigned there. He therefore went to Nazareth, a city of Galilee, which was under the government of Herod Antipas, and there lived till the Saviour was manifested to Israel. "Thus was fulfilled," says St. Matthew, "what was spoken by the prophets, *He shall be called a Nazarene.*" Though these precise words are not to be found in any of the prophets, yet the thing implied by them is very often foretold. The Israelites despised the Galileans in general, and the Nazarenes were ridiculed even by the Galileans themselves. Hence a Nazarene became a proverbial term

of reproach. Whenever, therefore, the prophets predicted, as they did in numberless places, that the Messiah should be contemned, traduced, and reproached, they predicted in effect, that he should be called a Nazarene.

Thus, my brethren, we have gone through the history of the infancy of Jesus. We have seen the most astonishing preparations made for his advent. We have seen angels and men, Jews and Gentiles, male and female, testifying his high dignity and glory. We have seen the providence of God carefully regulating every action that relates to him. In our next lecture we shall consider his youth; and as we prosecute his history, we shall be persuaded that he was deserving of this vigilant care, and that we ought to unite our voices with those who blessed God for his advent, and embraced him as their Saviour.

## SERMON XXXVIII.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. V.



YOUTH, BAPTISM, AND TEMPTATION.

LUKE ii. 40—51. MAT. iii. 13—17. iv. 1—11.

WE have conducted Jesus through the period of infancy, and have seen heaven and earth, Jews and Gentiles, testifying to his dignity, and blessing God for his birth. We naturally feel desirous now, to know the history of his youth and private life; to be told what early proofs he gave of the union of the divine and human natures in him; what progress he made in knowledge, and the methods by which he advanced therein; what opinions were formed of him by those who knew him; the nature of his intercourse with them; and various things of a similar nature. But over these events a veil is drawn, and we have no means of gratifying our curiosity. Probably they will be revealed to us in heaven, and there give us new cause of blessing and adoring the Saviour.

From his infancy to the age of thirty he remained in privacy at Nazareth. But does not his continuance in privacy, his residence for so long a time in this obscure village, declare to us, better than a thousand examples, his true humility?

One single event in his life, during this period, is recorded by St. Luke. It was required of the Israelites, that all the males should present themselves before God, in his temple at Jerusalem, three times every year: at the feast of the passover, of pentecost, and of tabernacles. Pious women, though not obliged by the law, went up also to the temple, to partake of the passover. At the age of twelve Jesus attended Joseph and Mary to this ordinance. Having remained at Jerusalem during the eight days of the festival, Joseph and Mary began their return to Nazareth, supposing Jesus to be with some of the numerous company with whom they travelled. At night, however, they in vain sought for him. Returning on the morrow to Jerusalem, they found him, on the third day from their leaving the city, in the chambers of the temple, sitting among the doctors, "both hearing them, and asking them questions." He *heard them*. They could not instruct him, but he listened with that docility and attention which becomes youth. He *asked them questions*; but it was that they themselves might be instructed.

The evangelist does not tell us what was the subject of these questions. There can be little doubt, however, that they related to the law and the prophets. These were the only study of the Jewish doctors, and a knowledge of them constituted the only science of the nation. The just, and sublime, and at the same time new manner, in which he ex-

plained the scriptures, filled the doctors with wonder. "All that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers."

Mary was, doubtless, gratified in beholding him in this situation. But she appears, at first, less to have felt joy in finding him again than the inquietude she experienced in missing him. She therefore said to him, "Son, why hast thou dealt thus with us? Behold thy father (Joseph was reputed such) and I have sought thee sorrowing." In truth, if Jesus had been only the son of Mary, his conduct would have been improper. The Lord, therefore, in his answer, reminds her that he has a father whose interests and service ought to be most dear to him. "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" "You ought to have understood by my miraculous conception, and the revelations which accompanied it, that I was not always to continue with you, but was to employ myself in His business who is really my Father." "After this," says the Evangelist, "he went down with them into Nazareth, and was subject unto them."

My young friends, this history should strongly incite you to piety towards God, and filial affection. When you behold Jesus in his youth, engaging with such zeal and earnestness in the services of the temple, and the business of his Father, and reluctantly abandoning the prayers, and the praises, which rose from the consecrated hill of Zion, will you not be induced to imitate so illustrious a model? When you behold the Son of God never forgetting that he is the Son of Mary; and although he had infinitely ennobled her, by condescending to be born of her; although he had conferred on her blessings unspeakable, yet "remaining subject unto her." will you ever

violate that filial duty which is enjoined upon you, not only by the powerful impressions of nature and the commands of the law, but also by the touching example of your Redeemer?

Having returned to Nazareth, Jesus there remained till he came from Galilee to be baptized by John. This circumstance next claims our attention in the prosecution of his history.

The baptism of John is termed the *baptism of repentance*. It was a token to the Jews who received it, of the necessity of purification, both of the heart and life, before they could become the subjects of the holy and immaculate Messiah. This, however, could not be its design when applied to Christ, who needed no repentance, who was without sin, and to prepare for whose coming it was instituted. The baptism received by Christ, was his solemn inauguration into the ministry upon which he was now entering; and he chose this ceremony, in conformity with the law of God.

By recurring to the Old Testament, you will find that the priests under the law entered upon the public service of God at the age of thirty; and were set apart to it by the partial application of water to their body from a laver, and by pouring oil upon their heads. This application of water was called by the Jews *baptism*, whenever they spoke or wrote in Greek, as is evident from the Septuagint translation made by them 286 years before the Saviour. In like manner, Christ entered upon his ministry when "he began to be about thirty years of age;" was solemnly installed into it by baptism, and was then anointed with the Holy Ghost, whose influences in the Old Testament are typified by the effusion of oil. The same allusion is made by Peter: "That word ye

know which began from Galilee after the *baptism* which John preached, how God *anointed* Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost." The baptism of Jesus then, I repeat, was a public consecration to his ministry, at the age and in correspondence with the forms used among the Jews.

This baptism took place at Bethabara. John probably chose this place in which to preach and baptize, because it was much frequented, especially at the great festivals, when a large proportion of the Jews who lived beyond Jordan, passed through it to go up to Jerusalem. John was entirely unacquainted with the Saviour. He had lived at first in the mountains of Judea, and on leaving them, had retired to the desert, whilst Jesus had resided in Galilee. But when Jesus presented himself before him, the Holy Spirit immediately revealed to him that this was He, whose coming he had announced without knowing him. No wonder that the holy forerunner, who knew the innocence and dignity of the Son of God, was filled with astonishment. No wonder that, sensible of his unworthiness to baptize him, he modestly declined it, and exclaimed "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" I am but a sinful man, and thou art the Saviour of sinners; I baptize but with water, and need more of the graces and gifts of that Spirit with which thou baptizest. Mine is the baptism of repentance; how then can I administer it to thee, who art sinless, and needest no repentance?

Thus John, penetrated with a sense of the dignity of the Saviour, and his own unworthiness, declines an honour that the angels themselves would have esteemed too great for them. But if through humility he at first resists the Son of God, he no longer



hesitates to obey when Jesus says to him, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness: "In my present state of humiliation it becomes me to perform all the works, and submit to all the ordinances appointed by God."

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he kneeled down on the banks of Jordan and prayed. The Evangelist does not tell us what was the subject of our Lord's prayer; but without doubt it related to that ministry upon which he was just entering. He knows that the moment of his inauguration is come, and he kneels to receive the influences of the anointing Spirit. To signalize this glorious inauguration, the sky was opened, and an immense expanse appeared beyond it, from which the Holy Spirit descended and rested upon him. The gifts of this Spirit, which Jesus now "received without measure," are invisible. But that the heavenly consecration of the Saviour might be seen by John, and his testimony to the Messiah be founded on full certainty, a visible symbol of the Holy Spirit was presented to him. This symbol was probably a luminous body, and it was in the form of a dove. Nothing could more beautifully shadow forth the character of the Saviour. His mildness, his gentleness, his charity, virtues of which the dove is the emblem, shone in the whole course of his life, in the doctrines which he preached, in the miracles which he wrought, in the sacrifice of himself, by which he consummated his ministry.

This appearance was attended by the voice of God the Father, which was heard (probably loud like thunder, as in the instance recorded, John xii. 29.) and which declared, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Such was the consecration of the Son of God. In this manner God declar-

ed to the Jews that he was their long expected deliverer.

Jesus, thus consecrated, began his ministry, not by going immediately to Jerusalem to declare his commission, but by retiring into the wilderness, there to prepare himself for his work, by fasting, meditation, prayer, and enduring temptations. Like Moses and Elijah, who were both types of him, he fasted for forty days, during all which time he was tempted of the devil. The various subtle arts which this great deceiver used for so long a period are not recorded. We are informed only of the three assaults made at the expiration of the forty days. These come next to be considered by us.

Two opposite opinions are held by Christians concerning the nature of this temptation. One class supposes that Satan visibly appeared to Christ, and that the speeches, and the actions here related, were addressed to his outward senses. The other class maintains that this temptation was addressed to his imagination; that the Saviour, exhausted and overcome by his long fasting, fell into a kind of trance, during the continuance of which, whilst his bodily and mental powers were enfeebled, the devil presented to his imagination those various sets of images which are here mentioned; which images were indignantly repelled by the Saviour.

Such are the two opinions which are held concerning this portion of our Lord's history. Which of them must we embrace? Let us hear the arguments on both sides, and we shall be able to determine.

Those who maintain that this temptation was addressed to his senses urge, That the Evangelists do not give the most remote intimation of its being a vi-

sion; but that, on the contrary, the plain and literal import of the expressions is, that Satan visibly appeared to Jesus Christ, and actually spoke and performed the things which are here attributed to him.

Those who maintain that this temptation was addressed to his imagination, reply to this argument :

1. They say that it is very frequent in the sacred scriptures to mention visionary and allegorical representations without giving the least notice that they were not real matters of fact; and to speak of circumstances which were impressed upon the imagination in the same terms that would be used if these circumstances had actually happened externally. In proof of this assertion, they refer to Jacob's vision of angels; (Gen. xxxii. 2.) to Satan's conference with God; (Job i. 6—12.) to Michaiah's vision: (1 Kings xxii. 19—23.) to Ezekiel's eating the roll; (Ezek. iii. 1, 2.) to Jeremiah's making bonds and yokes, and sending them to various kings. (Jer. xxvii. 1, 2.) All these circumstances, and many others, are confessed to be either visions or allegorical representations; yet because the impression made by them upon the mind was as forcible as though they had been real matters of fact, therefore no notice is taken by the sacred writers that they were not matters of fact which actually came to pass. Hence it is concluded, that even though the language of the Evangelists gives no intimation that this temptation happened in vision, yet still if the design and circumstances of it lead us to this opinion, we may safely embrace it. But it is added,

2. That at least one of the Evangelists intimates that this event passed in vision. St. Luke says, "He was led," or carried, "*in the Spirit.*"\* We

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\* Ηγήτοσ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι.

translate it, *by the Spirit*. Now, to be in the Spirit, is that form of expression which is used in various parts of the scriptures to be in a vision, or a trance. Thus (Rev. i. 10.) St. John says, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day;" i. e. as appears from the context, "I was in vision." Thus (Ezekiel xxxvii. 1.) the prophet, about to describe his vision of the valley of dry bones, says, "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out *in the Spirit*." Hence it is concluded, that St. Luke gives an intimation that the temptation was in vision. It is added,

3. That the circumstances of this event are such as cannot be consistently explained, except by supposing that this was a vision. Thus in the second temptation, it appears *improbable* that Satan should personally take the Saviour to the top of the temple, either by attending him through the streets of Jerusalem, or by conveying him through the air; that he should place him on a pinnacle where he could not stand without a miracle; that the crowd in the courts below should view this transaction without astonishment, (and it does not appear that they were moved by it.) All this is strange in the literal interpretation of this passage; but it is easy and natural, if we suppose it to have been a vision. And in the last temptation, it is said "the devil showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." Now this circumstance is plainly *impossible*, if it is taken in its literal sense; and therefore those persons who have maintained that the other temptations were a real fact, have nevertheless been forced to suppose that this was represented in vision. But if one part was a vision, why were not the others also? If we are constrained to acknowledge that the last temptation was addressed to the imagination, and not to

the senses, ought we not to form the same conclusion concerning the others, which are related in a manner precisely similar?

Those who maintain that this temptation did not happen in vision, bring forward a second argument. Christ, say they, underwent this temptation for our instruction, example, and benefit; but if he were tempted only in vision, these ends cannot be accomplished by it.

Those who maintain that this temptation did happen in vision, reply:—it is a true principle that Christ was here tempted for our example and instruction; and it is for this very reason that we assert that these circumstances happened in vision. If Satan visibly appeared to Christ, he was tempted in a manner totally different from what we are, and therefore cannot be a fit pattern to us. Nay, if Satan visibly appeared, Christ can scarcely be said to have experienced any temptation at all; since the force of temptation depends upon the care with which he conceals his agency. If he openly showed himself, spreading his seductions before us, we should be on our guard, and could easily resist him. Suppose, however, that this event was a vision, and then the mode of Christ's temptation is nearly similar to our own. Satan seized the moment in which his powers were enfeebled, to present before his imagination seductive images, and adroitly to vary these images as they were repelled by the Saviour.

In this manner these two classes defend their respective sentiments; and on weighing their arguments with all the accuracy in my power, I feel constrained to join with those who suppose that these events happened in vision.

Let us now consider the several circumstances in the order in which they are related, and make practical observations as we pass along.

We may observe *the time* in which this temptation happened. The Saviour had lately been pointed out to Israel as the promised Messiah; the Holy Ghost had visibly descended upon him; and a voice from heaven had proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Yet but a short period after these events he had to combat with the most furious assaults of Satan. This affords us an important instruction. *No spiritual privileges, however great, can exempt us from temptation.* We are apt to suppose, after we have enjoyed especial blessings, and obtained the assurances of our sonship, that we are freed from all danger, and have no need to dread any future seductions. This opinion is erroneous; God proportions our trials to our strength, and these special communications should be warnings to us to prepare for special trials. Art thou then, my brother, enjoying the light of God's countenance; holding intimate and delicious communion with thy Redeemer; receiving the pledges and the foretaste of heaven? be assured that God is in this manner preparing thee for the combat. The adversary of souls, who assailed the Redeemer immediately after the highest honours and privileges were conferred upon him, will by and by assail thee. Stand then prepared for his attacks, and sink not down into security.

Let us pass to the consideration of the temptations themselves. They are three; all disguised with art, and urged with subtlety. The first was grounded on the hunger caused by the Saviour's long abstinence from food. "And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards an hunger-

ed. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." It is thus that Satan always strives to take advantage of outward circumstances, in order to give force to his assaults. If we are in any distress, perplexity, or doubt, he tempts us to one of these two things : either to doubt of our filial relation to God, " If thou be the Son of God ;" or else to distrust Providence, and use improper means for our relief. In what manner then must we repel all temptations of this nature, which are grounded upon our distresses and wants ? Behold and imitate the example of the Saviour : he said, " It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." These words are quoted by our Lord from the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, and are part of the concluding address of Moses to the Israelites : " The Lord humbled thee," says this holy man, " and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know ; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." It is evident that by *bread*, Moses here understands all provisions that are produced in the ordinary course of nature ; and by *every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord*, he plainly means, whatever God shall please to produce out of the ordinary course of nature for the sustenance of his children. This then is the substance of the reply of the Saviour : ' You urge me, because I am in a barren and inhospitable desert, to question the affection of my Father, and to violate the laws of nature, by converting these stones into bread. But recollect the conduct of God

towards the Israelites of old. They also were in a desert; they also were oppressed by famine; yet God was still their tender Father, and he mercifully interposed to deliver them, raining down manna from heaven for their support. Of the affection of this God and Father I am confident, and in him I trust, knowing that even though I cannot obtain *bread*, the ordinary provisions of nature, yet his paternal goodness can support me by innumerable other means.' In this manner the Saviour repels the first temptation. And what are we to learn from this first temptation? Children of affliction, it affords consolation and instruction for you. Satan often suggests to those believers who are in circumstances of distress and sorrow, "If ye were the children of God, he would not visit you with such calamities." Afflicted Christian, remember Israel, remember thy Saviour; and then thou wilt acknowledge that distresses are not only consistent with, but that they even proceed from, the love of thy Father; then thou wilt be enabled with holy Job to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Learn also, ye who are chastened by the Lord, never to distrust Providence, nor to use unjustifiable means for your relief. How often does the adversary say to us, "Command these stones to become bread;" better your situation, supply your wants, get delivered from your burdens, by those means which are in your power, even though these means are not such as you would wish to use in other circumstances. Let us, after the example of our Lord, repel all such suggestions by a full and entire reliance upon the providence of God, by a perfect submission to his holy will, and by an unshaken persuasion that he will deliver us from our burthens when they shall have answered the benevo-



lent ends for which they were sent. The goodness of God can find us out in the middle of a desert; in the most unprosperous circumstances; and if our faith endures the trial, his angels will be sent to minister unto us. Some hand unlooked for, the instrument and messenger of an invisible power, may administer an abundant supply of all our wants; and they who trust to the declarations of the divine word shall not be disappointed.

Satan, repelled in this first assault, presents a new set of images to the fancy of the Saviour; so that in imagination he is placed on the pinnacle of the temple, and the second temptation suggested to him, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." The tempter, finding that he could not seduce our Lord to distrust God, and knowing how inclined man is to pass from one extreme to its opposite, endeavours here to lead him into presumption; and to further his purpose, and throw around it an air of piety, he quotes a passage of scripture, which however he curtails and misapplies. The substance of this suggestion is this: 'You have just declared that you have a full trust in the favour and protection of God. Cast yourself down then from this pinnacle; for the promise and providence of God are both engaged to defend you.' This temptation was no less speedily repulsed than the other. "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." *To tempt God*, is a frequent expression in the Holy Scriptures, and signifies to require unreasonable proofs of his providence; or presumptuously to rush into danger, and then to look for his protection, The purport of our

Saviour's reply then is this: 'My Father has given me sufficient proofs of his affection and care; to demand further testimonials would be, not to trust, but presumptuously to tempt him.' In this manner the Saviour repels the second temptation. And what are we to learn from this second temptation? It affords a striking reproof to all such as attempt to sanctify their sloth by pretending to trust in God without using the means that he has enjoined. Sometimes we see men totally neglecting their secular concerns, and urging in their defence that they trust in God; frequently we see men in their religious concerns sitting with folded arms, totally neglecting all means to acquire or strengthen the sentiments of piety, and urging in their defence that they trust in God. Foolish mortals! why will ye not perceive the difference between trusting and tempting God? Why will ye not acknowledge, that in your conduct you are acting conformably to that same temptation of Satan which was here rejected by our Lord?

Satan, not yet disheartened, makes a last assault, which, for malignity and wickedness, exceeds either of the preceding, and which was probably intended to disturb and harass the Saviour, rather than with any hope that he would comply with it. In fancy the Saviour is upon a high mountain, "and all the kingdoms of the world and their glory" are spread before him. The adversary then suggests to him, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." He had seduced the first Adam, by the hope of being like God; he endeavours to seduce the second Adam, by the hope of being the sovereign monarch of the world. He dares to propose the most execrable idolatry to Him who came into the world to destroy all idolatry, and to establish

the worship of the only living and true God. "There is a point, beyond which patience ceases to be a virtue, and degenerates into weakness." On hearing these blasphemies, the Saviour, who had hitherto contented himself with gently turning aside the darts which had been thrown at him, could no longer retain his indignation, but drives the tempter away by those powerful words: "Get thee hence, Satan. It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." The agitation into which this last horrid suggestion threw the mind of Jesus, chased away the lassitude and weakness caused by his fasting, restored his bodily and mental powers to their usual vigour, and made all the temptations with which Satan had harassed him to vanish. "Angels came and ministered unto him." He, who had endured hunger without relinquishing his hope and confidence, had a supply of refreshment from heaven itself. He, who had refused to tempt God by requiring unreasonable proofs of his paternal affection and care, received the most illustrious marks of the affection of his Father. He, who accepted not honour and power when offered him by Satan, was attended, as the Lord of heaven and earth, by the spirits of the Most High. In this manner the Saviour repels the third temptation; and what are we to learn from his conduct? To despise the delusive enjoyments and the unsubstantial pleasures of earth; to view with contempt the world, when tendered to us as the reward of sin, and to reject with indignant scorn both the offer and the offerer; to keep fresh upon our minds a sense of our obligations to God; to know no other ambition than that of serving him and keeping his commandments; and to reject, with abhorrence and indignation, every temptation that would draw

us aside from him. Oh! if we always acted thus, Satan, discomfited, would flee from us; the angels would minister unto us; and the Captain of our salvation, in whose paths we should tread, would approve and bless us.

We shall conclude this discourse by some general observations resulting from the subject.

1. What cause do we see, from the view of Jesus in the desert, *to admire the matchless grace and compassion of our Redeemer!* If a sinful suggestion produce such grief in the soul of a believer, who nevertheless has but a feeble idea of the infinite odiousness of sin, who is but partially sanctified, who always bears within him the remains of corruption, which are flattered by these suggestions, then judge what inconceivable anguish, what unutterable distress the Saviour must have experienced, when this flood of temptations was poured in upon him; upon him, the Holy of Holies, who knew all the guilt of sin, and who, by his nature and inclinations, was infinitely removed from it! Yet to such woes the Saviour willingly submitted, that he might thereby afford us consolation and confidence in our spiritual combats. And surely we must experience abundant consolation from this event. It is cheering to the mind perplexed by temptation, to reflect that our Lord has experienced temptation, and therefore can sympathize with us; that our Lord has experienced the joy of being delivered from temptation, and therefore will be ready to afford us deliverance. Well might Paul say, with so much exultation, "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but one who was tempted in all points like as we are; and in that he was tempted, is able" and disposed "to succour them

that are tempted. We will therefore go boldly to the throne of grace, confident that we shall obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

2. This view of Jesus in the desert, teaches us that *evil thoughts may be injected into the mind, and yet we be without sin*, provided these thoughts are hateful to us, and we immediately and vigorously resist them. It is not unfrequently the case, that those whose consciences are most tender are distressed, and made to question their sincerity, because wicked, and even blasphemous thoughts, which fill them with horror and anguish, suddenly rise in their minds. Such thoughts are the fiery darts of Satan, to which the Apostle alludes. We cannot prevent their admission, though we may refuse to retain them. If, when they rise, we cherish them, dwell on them with pleasure, and willingly entertain them, they show that we are yet in our sins. But if, on the contrary, we view them with abhorrence, struggle to expel them, and feel pained by them, though they distress, they do not defile us: nay, the dread and hatred of them which we feel for them, are evidences, and strong evidences of our love to God, since they can pain us so far only as they are opposed to the prevailing dispositions of our hearts. If, then, my brethren, you are harassed by such suggestions, let them incite you to greater earnestness in prayer, and the other exercises of religion; but let them not lead you to question your sincerity.

3. Finally: we are taught by this subject, *how far the power of Satan extends, and in what manner we may resist him*. He can only tempt, he cannot force. He can only say, "Cast thyself down," but he cannot constrain us to comply with his solicitations. When we sin, it is entirely voluntary, and the fault is

chargeable only upon ourselves. He, it is true, spreads the bait before us, but it is we who seize it, and find in it our death. His temptations, though strong, are not irresistible. We may overcome them, if, like our Saviour, we never dally with them, but, on their first appearance, resolutely and indignantly repel them; if, like him, we put a strict rein on our imagination, and never suffer it to bear us further than reason and religion approve; if, like him, we use the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, carefully studying it, and wisely applying it to the different situations in which we may be placed, to the different snares which may be spread before us.

God give us grace thus to act, and then we shall at last be admitted into that happier Eden, where he who marred the beauty of the first shall never enter; into that blissful world, where sin and temptation shall no more be known.

## SERMON XXXIX.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. VI.



TESTIMONY OF JOHN—ANDREW, SIMON, AND NATHANIEL BECOME  
DISCIPLES—MARRIAGE OF CANA—EXPULSION OF BUYERS AND  
SELLERS FROM THE TEMPLE.

JOHN i. 19—51. ii.

WHEN Joshua was appointed by God, to bring the Israelites into the land of Canaan, and to subdue the nations that opposed their progress, he did not think that it was sufficient to give wise directions to his troops, but placing himself at their head, he animated them by his example; exposing himself to the same dangers which they encountered, he gained for them a full and perfect victory. Thus acted also the true Joshua, of whom the son of Nun was but a feeble type. Thus acted the blessed Saviour, appointed by God, to bring the spiritual Israelites to the heavenly Canaan; and to teach them to vanquish the principalities and powers which combat against them. He not only marked out, by the wisest precepts, and the most unerring instructions, the con-

duct we must pursue, if we would obtain the crown of victory, but he likewise placed himself in the front of the battle, and received on his own shield the most envenomed darts of our adversary. In our last lecture, we considered him thus contending with the prince of darkness, resisting all his assaults, baffling all his arts, defeating all his seductions, and we were taught from his example some useful lessons on the mode of repelling those attacks that are daily made on us by our spiritual foes. Let us continue to follow his instructive history.

The Jewish sanhedrim, struck with the extraordinary piety, zeal, and eloquence of John the Baptist, and with the effect produced by his preaching upon the people, began to suppose that he might be the long expected Messiah. This opinion was strengthened by his austere life, by the miracles which attended his birth, by his repeated declarations that the kingdom of God was at hand, and by his solemn baptism. They therefore sent to him a deputation of priests and Levites to inquire whether he were the Christ. John without hesitancy replied that he was only his forerunner, sent to prepare the way before him. About the time that this deputation arrived, Jesus had returned from the wilderness after the temptation, and was passing by while John stood with the multitude on the banks of Jordan. He immediately directed the people to him, and exclaimed, "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*"

We have already remarked that Bethabara, where this event happened, was, as the name itself intimates,\* a place through which a great proportion of

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\* בת-עבירה, house of passage.



the Jews, who lived beyond Jordan, passed, in order to go up to Jerusalem. It was now crowded, as the people from all parts were going up to the temple, to the feast of pentecost, carrying with them their lambs, there to be offered in sacrifice. In reference to this circumstance he cries, "The blood of these victims is insufficient to efface your sins. This can be done only by that victim whom you here behold, who was prefigured by all the typical sacrifices of atonement, which you or your fathers have offered, and who alone gave efficacy to them. This holy, meek, and humble Jesus is "the Lamb without blemish, and without spot, who was fore-ordained and slain" in the counsels of God "before the foundation of the world, but is now manifested," (1 Peter i. 9. 20.) to deliver from the guilt, the dominion, and the punishment of sin, every man of every nation, who believes on him. He is the *Lamb of God*, being chosen, set apart, and sent by him, devoted to him, and accepted of him. *Behold* him, fix your eyes upon him, and look by faith unto him."

Such was the address of John the Baptist, and such is the address which the ministers of the gospel still make to their hearers. May I not say, that we are authorized thus to cry to you even with greater authority and importunity than he did to the Jews; since you may behold, what they could not, the completion of his sacrifice, the history of his ministry, and the displays of his grace to myriads of his disciples; since the revelation of his will in the New Testament enables you to penetrate more deeply into the mystery of redemption, and to see more of the designs of God? "*Behold then the Lamb of God.*" Behold him, careless sinner! and in the dignity of this victim provided for sin, and in the agonies of

that sacrifice by which he expiated for man, read the evil and malignity of sin, and learn the severity of the punishment which awaits thee, if his blood be not sprinkled upon thee, if thou hast no part in his sacrifice.

Behold him, broken-hearted penitent! A believing view of this Lamb of God will always afford peace to the contrite soul. For thee he was sent, for thee he was offered up. Banish the false and discouraging thought that thou art excluded from his mercy: he "taketh away the sin of the world;" he is infinite in power and grace. Listen to him whilst he cries, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." Trust in him with confidence, for "he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him."

Behold him, professing Christian, and triumph in the sufficiency of his merits, glory in the firm foundation on which your hope is built; but remember, that he taketh away, not only the guilt, but also the power of sin; and that you in vain pretend to behold him as the ground of your hope, if you do not at the same time look to him as a pattern for your imitation. *Behold the Lamb of God.* He is worthy the fixed contemplation of us all. Angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, continually view him in heaven with ever new delight; and all the pious on earth, by faith behold his perfections, and fasten their thoughts upon them as the spring of their sweetest consolation, as the most powerful incentive to holiness.

The next day after John had given this public testimony to Jesus, he was standing with two disciples when the Saviour passed, and repeated it in their hearing. These disciples were Andrew. Simon

Peter's brother, and probably John the Evangelist, it being customary with him to conceal his own name in his writings. They immediately followed Jesus to his habitation, and were received with that benignity and kindness which he ever displayed. A long conversation with him, united to the testimony of the Baptist, the descent of the Spirit upon him, and the voice from heaven, could not fail to convince them that he was indeed the Messiah.

The soul that is acquainted with Christ wishes its neighbours, its friends, and relatives, to know him also. No wonder then that Andrew, full of joy, hastened to find his brother Simon, to inform him that Messiah had come, and to carry him to behold the object of their common wishes and desires. Simon hastens to the Saviour, who receives him with affection; and, though he had never seen him before, salutes him by his own and his father's name, adding, that he should henceforth be called *Cephas*, which in the Syro-Chaldaic, the language then spoken by the Jews, has the same signification with the word  $\pi\epsilon\tau\rho\alpha$  in Greek, and *rock* or *stone* in English. Hence this disciple derived the name of Peter, by which he was usually henceforth distinguished. "When Jesus beheld him, he said, thou art Simon the son of Jonah, thou shalt be called Cephas, which is, by interpretation, a stone." By the imposition of this new and characteristic name, the Saviour intimated that he would display a firmness of resolution, and a constancy of attachment; and that the Christian church should be built upon his labours. The event justified this prediction; since he was the first who, after the miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit, preached the gospel to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, and since he was the first also who carried it to the Gentile nations.

The next day after Jesus had thus spoken to Peter and Andrew, he returned into Galilee, whence he had come to be baptized by John. He there finds Philip, whom he had destined to the apostleship, and says unto him, "Follow me," to be a witness of my discourses and my actions. Philip, who being a townsman of Andrew and Peter, had perhaps heard them speak of Jesus, and been made acquainted with the testimony of the Baptist, and whose heart was also impressed by the Holy Spirit, immediately followed the Redeemer. Imitate this docility, my brethren; be ready to obey the voice of the Lord, and to follow him the moment he calls you. Thus only can you be his disciples.

Philip, like Andrew, was not satisfied with having himself found the Saviour. He immediately endeavours to make Nathaniel (who is supposed to be the same person, who is mentioned by the other Evangelists under the name of Bartholemew) acquainted with him. Nathaniel had the same prejudices which generally prevailed among his countrymen, and thought that nothing good could proceed from Nazareth; but being of a candid disposition and open to conviction, he instantly complied with the request of Philip, who asked him to "come and see," that he might form a right judgment respecting this momentous question. On his approach Jesus honoured him with the amiable character of "an Israelite indeed without guile;" 'a man without prevailing and allowed insincerity in his conduct towards God or his fellow creatures.' Nathaniel, surprised at this high eulogium from one that he had never seen, inquires of Jesus, "whence knowest thou me?" Jesus answered, "before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree I saw

thee." i. e. I 'have thoroughly known you without any personal interview with you. To convince you of this, I assure you that I was present with you in a circumstance to which none but God and your own soul were privy. Under the fig-tree, to which you had retired before Philip called you, I saw your inmost soul.' We cannot tell what had been the particular occupations of Nathaniel under the fig-tree, whether he had been praying for instruction respecting the Messiah, or, as is not improbable, meditating on Jacob's vision, or in some other mode maintaining secret intercourse with God. But when Jesus reminded him of this solemn secret transaction between God and his soul, all his prejudices vanished; and convinced that Christ was the searcher of hearts, he cried out with humility and reverence, " Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the king of Israel." Jesus in reply commended his faith, but assured him, that this was but a prelude to what he should hereafter behold, since he should see the whole frame of nature subject to his command; a happy correspondence established by him between heaven and earth; and angels attending to pay their honours to him.

My brethren, are there many of us to whom Jesus would give the same lovely character as he here does to Nathaniel; "*an Israelite indeed without guile?*" Like Nathaniel we must appear before him, and as he discerned the character of this disciple so as to pronounce upon it with infallible certainty, so he discerns our characters, and will declare them to the universe. Of more than one of us I trust he will say, 'Behold an Israelite indeed in whom was no guile. I saw him under the fig-tree; I heard his groans; I saw his wrestlings with God in prayer; I treasured up his tears: and I testify before all that his heart was

right with God.' But I fear that of a far greater number of us he will declare, 'Behold a dissembler with God; an Israelite only in name. I saw him under the fig-tree; I marked the secret corruptions that he harboured in his heart, and the allowed neglects of which he was habitually guilty: he would follow his convictions, and devote himself to me as far as his ease, his honour, and his interests would permit, but no further; and therefore, on account of his secret reserves, and his allowed guile, he must take his portion with hypocrites and unbelievers.' Who can reflect on the consequences of such a decision, and not desire so to live that the testimony of Jesus may be favourable to him?

On the third day after Jesus and his disciples arrived at Galilee, they went to a marriage that was in Cana. During the progress of the feast the wine failed; perhaps in consequence of the number who came to see the Saviour, who now began to excite the public attention. Mary mentioned it to Jesus, and intimated her desire that he would by miracle supply them; the Saviour reproved her for presuming to direct him in the duties of his ministry; and insinuated that his miracles were to be performed, not for the convenience of his friends, but in pursuance of the great ends he had in view, the conversion and salvation of mankind. But though Mary acted improperly in making this request, Jesus knowing that it would confirm his disciples' faith, and advance his mission, complied with it; and ordering six water-pots to be filled with water, instantly changed it into wine; thus making a sufficient provision for the seven days of the feast, and even providing for the future necessities of the new married couple, by conferring on them a valuable nuptial present in this modest

and miraculous manner. There could be but little danger that any of the guests would abuse this gift. Receiving the wine in this miraculous manner, they would regard it as in some sense sacred, and would use it with a profound respect for him; blessing God for his goodness in sending the Messiah, and expressing their gratitude to this Messiah for sitting with them at the same table.

Thus Jesus performed his first public miracle at a marriage feast. His unsullied holiness was never mingled with misanthropy, but always blended with the gentlest condescension; and his religion permits us innocent enjoyment. Who can view the conduct of our Redeemer without being enamoured with his character; without being convinced that we have the kindest of masters, and the most exalted of models? “No affected singularities, no supercilious moroseness, no frivolous ostentations of seemingly high, but really fruitless performances; nothing that might deter a timorous or discourage an humble disciple, is observable in his practice. But on the contrary his conversation is full of condescension and sweetness, of meekness and candour; calculated to allure all mankind to approach him, and rejoice in an intercourse with him. He did not seclude himself in the retirement of a cloister, or the obscurity of a wilderness, but conversed freely and indifferently with all men:”\* honouring their tables with his presence, complying with the innocent practices that custom authorized; and giving his instructions in the streets, in the temple, in private houses, in a manner the most mild, and gentle, and interesting. Behold your model, Christians! Imitate it, if you would

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\* Barrow.

indeed resemble Jesus, and render his religion lovely in the eyes of men.

From Cana, says the Evangelist, "he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and *his brethren*, and his disciples." The *brethren* of our Lord are several times mentioned by the Evangelists. In the language of the Jews this term is applied to any near connexion, as is evident from numerous passages both of the Old and New Testament, which you must recollect. In conformity with this mode of speaking, the sacred writers call the kindred of the blessed Virgin the brethren and sisters of her only Son. As Mary was a virgin when she conceived, and after she brought forth our Saviour, so did she continue in the same state and condition, and was commended by our Saviour to his beloved disciple, as the mother only now of an adopted son.\*

From Capernaum, Jesus went up to Jerusalem, to be present at the passover. Arrived there, he went immediately to the temple, and "found those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money;" i. e. the people who gave the Jews from foreign countries current money of Judea instead of the money of the country from which they came. There were two things criminal in this commerce: 1. It was carried on in a sacred place, which should have been destined only to the service of God: the temple was converted into a public market. And 2. Much fraud and injustice was practised. This we may conclude from the words of our Saviour, when a little before his death he was obliged a second time to use a similar act of severity: "It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer,

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\* See Pearson on the Creed.



but ye have made it a den of thieves." The Lord, indignant at this profanation of the temple, drove them out, with the sheep and oxen, and overturned the seats of the money changers, and commanded the doves to be taken out. It is the beautiful character of Jesus, that he was never irritated at the outrages committed on himself. He suffered them, or repelled them, with a mildness and patience which showed that he was truly the Lamb of God. But when God his Father is outraged, his zeal is inflamed, his indignation is excited. And even then he does not dart forth the thunders which he holds in his hands; he only reproveth, censures, and corrects.

Pride and interest were equally offended by the action of the Saviour. Nevertheless, no resistance was made to him. Perhaps the persons who had been in fault were daunted by that air of majesty and holiness which rendered the Saviour terrible when inspired by a sacred indignation; perhaps they were restrained by the energy of his miraculous power on their minds.

His disciples beholding him, and attributing his conduct to that fervent concern for the purity of God's house with which David was animated, applied to him immediately that declaration of the Psalms, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." The rulers of the Jews immediately inquire of Jesus by what authority he had undertaken to purify the temple. They taught that none but God, or a prophet, was authorized to oppose a practice tolerated by the sanhedrim and priests; and that no one could be acknowledged a prophet except from working miracles, or uttering predictions, which were justified by the event. Christ had yet wrought no miracle in the presence of those who spoke to him, and

they therefore inquire, "what sign showest thou, seeing thou dost these things?" But since a miracle was not needed to authorize the Saviour to correct what was evidently wrong, he would perform none. He however announced to them one which should happen afterwards. Pointing to his body, he said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews, however, supposing that he spoke of the temple in which they stood, replied, "Forty and six years was this temple building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?" A moment's reflection must have convinced them that Jesus, who had just shown such an interest in the preservation and sanctity of the house of God, did not refer to it; but to that temple in which dwelt the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

My brethren, let us imitate the zeal of our Lord, in opposing with all our strength every thing inconsistent with the reverence due to God; but let our zeal be enlightened, prudent, attended by meekness and charity. Let us beware, lest under pretence of acting for the glory of God and the interest of religion, we act from selfish views or from hatred to our brethren. The vilest passions have often been decked with the name of zeal; but a true zeal must always be accompanied, directed, and supported by an ardent love for God, for man, for truth, and for virtue. Such was the zeal by which our Lord was animated, and which he requires of his followers.

Jesus remained at Jerusalem during the whole of the passover, and wrought many miracles. Numbers "believed in his name; but Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man." He knew that, notwith-

standing their present belief and professions, they would not continue attached to him, but would abandon him. We see in these persons, that men might be witnesses of the miracles of Jesus, and regard him as sent from God, and yet not be his faithful disciples. In like manner now we may have a speculative belief in the gospel, may profess it, and yet be far from the kingdom of God. The mind may be convinced, whilst the heart is unchanged. Since our Lord knoweth what is in man, of what importance is it to have our mind and heart exempt from sin! We cannot impose upon him by deceitful appearances. Let us then be really and inwardly what we seem externally. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

## SERMON XL.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. VII.



CONVERSATION WITH NICODEMUS.

JOHN iii. 7.

*Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*

AMONG those who were struck with the miracles performed by Jesus during the passover, was Nicodemus, a pharisee, a member of the great council, and a teacher of the law. Desirous of learning what were the doctrines of one who, by controlling at his pleasure the laws of nature, proved that he was sent from God; yet at the same time, fearful of exciting the anger and reproaches of his fellow-pharisees, and his colleagues in the sanhedrim, who already hated Jesus, he came to the Saviour by night, and said unto him, "Rabbi, we know thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." In seeking Christ, Nicodemus displayed a love of truth; in his address he shows respect and candour; but in choosing the

night for his visit, he betrays a weakness which dishonours him. Immediately after this address, he seems to have inquired of our Lord, what that doctrine was which he was sent into the world to teach, and which he confirmed and proved by such mighty miracles. Jesus replied, My doctrine is briefly this, whoever will enter into the kingdom of grace here, or glory hereafter, must be born again. Nicodemus, grossly misunderstanding the Saviour's words, and supposing that he spoke literally of a natural birth, Jesus rectified his error, by informing him that he spoke of a birth by water and the Spirit, of a new nature given by the Holy Ghost, and of a reception of the gospel, testified by a submission to its initiating ordinance. Even were a second natural birth possible, he adds, it would be unavailing, since after it a man would be as sinful as before, and since the Spirit alone could give a spiritual and holy nature. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not then that I say unto you, Ye must be born again." If you cannot understand how this second birth is produced; if the influences by which you must be regenerated are imperceptible to sense, yet the effects of regeneration are not so; and in this respect it resembles so many great effects in nature, which you must acknowledge, though you cannot discern their causes. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus, still surprised to hear that the Jews as well as the Gentiles were to be born again, exclaims, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered, "Art thou a teacher in Israel, and knowest not these things."

which are so clearly and unequivocally taught in those prophets, in which it is your office to instruct the people?

My brethren, with what awful solemnity should we meditate on these declarations of Him who came from heaven to teach us the will of his Father, and who will award our eternal destinies according to the decisions laid down by him in his holy word? Favour me then with your attention, while I consider the nature and necessity of regeneration. It is a subject in which every individual is concerned, and to which each one of you should therefore listen with self-application. Every soul now in the house of the Lord is either an unregenerate sinner or a regenerate believer, (there is no middle state) and is of consequence either the enemy or the friend of God, exposed to his curse, or interested in his favour; treading the downward path to hell, or advancing to the kingdom of glory. Of what infinite importance is it that we discover to which of these two classes we belong. May the Lord assist us in making this discovery! Carry thine own word, blessed Jesus, with energy to our souls, that so the careless may be alarmed at their danger, and humbled at their guilt, and thine own children filled with the assurance of hope, and with joy in believing.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. Marvel not that I say unto you, Ye must be born again.”

Before I mention those marks whereby you may determine whether this all-important change has been experienced by you, suffer me to make a few previous remarks illustrative of it.

1. The change expressed by the term regeneration, is a *moral* and not a *physical* change. The sub-

stance, the essence of our nature remain unaltered. A holy principle is implanted in the soul, but there is no transmutation of its substance. When Christ changed water into wine, when the rod of Moses became a serpent, these things changed their nature itself. There is nothing like this, or like the change of a beast into a man, or of a plant into an animal, in regeneration. The faculties of the soul, like all the works of the Creator, are good in themselves. To be capable of knowing, of thinking, of willing; this is the essence of the soul; and it is not destroyed by regeneration. After regeneration it is the same man, having the same constituent parts, the same faculties of body and soul: but a holy temper is given to the soul, a spiritual principle is implanted in it, which produces a perfect change in the operation of the affections and passions, and in the conduct of the life.

2. This declaration of our Saviour implies that the change produced in a natural man at his conversion, is a *great*, a *radical*, and an *internal change*. If conversion were but a trifling matter, if there were not an immense difference between the renewed and unrenewed soul, the Saviour would not have used the strong language of the text. If to "see the kingdom of God" nothing was requisite but a pharisaic righteousness, or a philosophical virtue; or even if it were necessary only to be in the visible church of Christ; to be acquainted with the truths of the gospel, and frequently to converse on them; to attend diligently the ordinances of religion; to present some prayers to God, and to give some alms to the distressed. If this were all that God requires, there would be no necessity of our being born again. Nay, even a partial change of the *inward man* is insufficient to correspond with all the force of this term. To what

purpose should we boast of having experienced the illumination of Balaam, the humiliation of Ahab, the confession of Judas, the faith of Simon Magus, the confidence of the unbelieving Jews, the attention of Ezekiel's auditors, the reformation of Herod, and (what perhaps includes all these together) the promising appearances of the stony-ground hearers, if like them we rest in this partial change? All this can be produced by human endeavours, by moral persuasions. To accomplish all this, it is not necessary that we be "born again—born of the Spirit." If this were all that is required of us, it would not have been necessary for the Son of God to leave his heaven, to suffer, and bleed upon the cross. It would not have been necessary for the Holy Ghost to descend, or for God to work. Deceive not yourselves. Regeneration must mean more than cold forms, moral virtues, and partial amendment; and if you experience nothing else, "verily, verily I say unto you, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." All this is only covering the wrinkles of the old Adam with a little paint, and concealing his deformity by a handsome mask. Take it then for granted, that if the change you have undergone be not radical, universal, and inward, you are yet in your sins.

3. These expressions, "Ye must be born again,—born of the Spirit," imply that this change is the work of God, the effect of his omnipotence, and his immediate operation. Thus it is said expressly that "we are the *workmanship of God*, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Before regeneration the scriptures constantly declare us to be "*dead* in trespasses and sins;" without motion, activity, and power. Apply all natural agents to corrupted man; you will never by these alone make of him a new man, animated



by spiritual life. Let parents and teachers come to him with their precepts; let Moses advance with his rod; let preachers come with their exhortations, their promises, and threatenings; they will never be able to move him, if God himself does not come, if by his almighty and immediate action he does not create the new man and the new spirit. This truth is ungrateful to the natural man. He will never cordially assent to this humbling doctrine, till the Spirit of God begins to work upon him. But he must believe and feel this his inability, or he will never be led to the Saviour. While he relies upon his own power, he will not implore the influences of that Spirit, by whom alone he can be born again.

After these observations, let us consider more in detail the change which regeneration produces on the *mind*, on the *heart*, and on the *life*.

1. By regeneration the *darkness* and *blindness* which formerly rested on the mind are dispelled, and new views and sentiments are given of God, of Christ, of ourselves, of the world, of eternity, of holiness, of the gospel plan of salvation; in short, of every thing with which we are conversant.

Before we had either formed false conceptions of *God*, representing him to ourselves as possessed only of those attributes against which the natural heart has no repugnance; stripping him in our imagination of those perfections which are opposed to the sinner, and substituting a God all mercy for the thrice-holy Jehovah. Or if we had a true view of his nature, of that unspotted purity which abhors iniquity, of that inflexible justice, which will by no means clear the guilty, we felt no love for these perfections, we wished that God were divested of them. How different are the views of the new-born soul! It sees an ex-

cellence and loveliness in the divine character deserving its constant adoration, service, and affection. It beholds an unspeakable beauty in every thing belonging to God; in his justice and holiness, as well as in his mercy and grace; in his laws and his providences; in his works and his word. Filled with admiration and delight, it is often absorbed in God, and self is forgotten while it is swallowed up, as it were, in the contemplation of the divine glories.

Once the renewed person could think and speak of *the Saviour* and *his atonement* with profane coldness. But now these are objects in which he sees such excellence as to overwhelm his soul with wonder, gratitude, and love. A crucified Christ appears to him now to be indeed "the power of God and the wisdom of God." He sees a divine excellence and suitability in his mediatorial character and his mediatorial work. If he is asked, "What is thy beloved more than another's beloved?" he can answer, from the ravishing views he has had of Jesus, "He is altogether lovely." With Paul he "counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ his Lord." With Paul he delights to contemplate the grace, the condescension, the wisdom displayed in the redemption of man; to stand on the brink of this abyss of mercy, and after in vain endeavouring to fathom or measure it, to cry out, "Oh the height, the length, the depth, and the breadth of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge!"

He now has different views of *himself* and of *sin*. He before esteemed sin as a pardonable frailty, which might be excused from the weakness and corruption of man, and from the force of temptation; and for his indulgence in which God would not, except he were a hard master, consign him to eternal

perdition. He now sees its deep guilt, its infinite odiousness, its full desert of hell. He now sees that God must renounce his attributes or punish it. He now is humbled and abased under a sense of that corruption which in his natural state he pleaded as an extenuation of his crimes. His high and lofty ideas of himself are dissipated, and he feels that he is a poor, miserable sinner. He confessed this formerly with his lips; but when he now cries, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," it is the language of his inmost soul, it proceeds from the centre of his heart.

He has new views of *holiness*, of the *world*, of *eternity*. Formerly he esteemed as his principal happiness, the enjoyment of the pleasures, the acquisition of the honours, the accumulation of the riches of the world. To be encompassed by the delights of earth, to be esteemed honourable by men, to have his coffers overflowing with wealth; appeared to him a happier life than to deny the flesh, to mortify the passions, to live under a sense of the presence of God, in the exercises of the offices of devotion, and the duties of piety. But now he sees that this world is vanity; that eternity alone deserves his cares; that a man who has a God, and a soul, and an everlasting state to attend to, is a fool if he forgets them for the sake of earth; that a life of holiness is the only life which is safe, honourable, pleasant, or reasonable.

In one word, the regenerate man, having learned to estimate things according to their real value, finds a perfect revolution in his sentiments; finds himself, as it were, in a new world; and, while he blesses God for his "marvellous light," wonders at the folly of his former opinions.

2. By regeneration a man's *chief end* is changed. By a man's chief end, we mean that which he principally seeks after; that which it is the great object of his labours and cares to acquire. The chief end of the unregenerate is temporal felicity; for this they principally exert themselves; this has the first and the best of their thoughts and exertions; they esteem themselves happy in proportion as this is acquired by them, and miserable in proportion as it is wanting. It is otherwise with those that are renewed. As they know that there is greater excellence in God and in heaven, than in earth, they have there laid up their treasure, and fixed their hopes. The world does not deceive them by its false appearances; they know that it cannot make them happy, nor save them from the grave and hell; and they will not, therefore, put it in the place of God and heaven, and take it as their portion. They begin earnestly to seek the Lord and eternal felicity. This is their great business, their ultimate aim, their chief intent. If God were now to offer them the possession of the whole world for myriads of years, without the divine grace and favour, and the hope of everlasting felicity, they would still esteem themselves undone wretches. The same things which satisfied them formerly will not now. They seek pleasures, but they are everlasting pleasures; riches, but they are durable riches; honour, but it is that honour which cometh of God only. My brethren, examine yourselves deeply on this point. It is not the abstinence from a few sins, or outward decency, which constitutes the Christian, but this change of your chief end. Inquire what you love and desire most; in what you place your felicity; what possesses your hearts, and is the chief business of your lives? If

this be not God, and holiness, and heaven, you must be born again.

3. By regeneration the *affections* are changed, and made to flow in a different and opposite channel. An unconverted man has no *pleasure* in God, and spiritual things, and holy occupations. He that is born again, on the contrary, *delights* in God, in doing his will, in studying his word, in holding communion with him, in his day, in his ordinances, in his law, and in his people. His *sorrows* are equally different from what they were before his regeneration. Formerly it pained him more to lose earthly enjoyments, to be injured, to be disgraced, to suffer in his estate, or body, than to lie under the wrath of God. He felt not the weight of unpardoned sin; he was tranquil and calm, though he was a stranger to the renewing influences of the spirit, and was in hourly danger of damnation. Oh, how different are his feelings now! One doubt of the love of God is now more grievous to him than the severest earthly sufferings. The remains of indwelling corruption are more painful to him than the mountains of unmortified sin were before.

As the regenerate have thus new joys and sorrows, so they have new *hopes*. An unconverted man has a hope that is contrary to the scripture, and that will disappoint his soul. Though he continues at a distance from God, though he walks in those paths which the Lord of heaven has declared conducts to destruction, yet he still expects to be saved. But when born of the Spirit, he sees that all these hopes on which he had rested his soul were vain; and instead of them he receives one that is scriptural, rational, quickening, and comforting; not merely a cold, dead hope of escaping misery, but a living hope of

seeing the face of God for ever; a hope that maketh not ashamed, that purifieth, that is an anchor to the soul, and that is totally different from the unfounded expectations that he entertained before.

If in like manner, you attend to all the other affections of the natural man, you will find that the current of all of them is changed by regenerating grace.

4. Regeneration produces an equal change in *the life*. "By their fruits ye shall know them," is the test of piety given by the Saviour. It is a test, the truth of which is exemplified by the regenerate. Though the remains of corruption within them still causes them to mourn, and sometimes draws them aside from God, and prevents them from attaining that perfection in holiness at which they aim, and which they desire, yet sin no longer reigns over them; they renounce those habitual transgressions in which they indulged; the main bent of their heart and life is against sin, and their chief desire and endeavour is to destroy it; and their delight is in the work and worship of God. They endeavour to perform the whole will of God; to perform all the social and benevolent duties, as well as to acquire those graces more peculiarly devotional. The great business of their lives is to glorify God, to extend the church of Jesus, to adorn the profession of the gospel, to benefit their fellow-men, and to save themselves.

Thus, my brethren, I have, in a very brief and cursory manner, shown you the nature of regeneration. I have endeavoured to speak so plainly, that every one of you may know what is his state and character.

May God sanctify unto us his preached word, give us regenerating grace, and enable us to know from experience, what it is to be "born again."

## SERMON XLI.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. VIII.



CONVERSATION WITH THE SAMARITAN WOMAN.

JOHN iv. 1—42.

IN our last lecture on the life of Christ, we heard him declaring to Nicodemus the most interesting truths. This ruler of the Jews appears to have been deeply affected by this interview, since from this time he became a disciple of Jesus, defended him in the great council of which he was a member, and with Joseph of Arimathea, paid him the honours of a funeral, when all his bosom friends deserted him. We are now to contemplate the Saviour conversing with a different character, with a woman who was a Samaritan, and whose life was immoral. Though the haughty Pharisees taught that she was beyond the reach of pardon; that the covenant made no provision for her; that she was undone without resource; yet the compassionate Saviour, who came "to seek and to save that which was lost," spoke to her in different accents. Instead of confirming her

in guilt, or sinking her in despair, by such merciless doctrines, he taught her that the streams of grace could cleanse even her polluted soul; that God was ready to receive her on repentance, and faith in the Messiah, and to forgive her iniquities, however numerous and aggravated they had been.

Jesus, having announced the gospel at Jerusalem, and confirmed it by many miracles during the feast of the passover, went into other parts of Judea to proclaim these glad tidings. The number of his disciples increasing daily, the pharisees were offended, and began to plot the destruction of a teacher who so clearly exposed their corrupt glosses of the law, and so boldly censured their vices and hypocrisy. The predestined time for his death not being come, he left Judea to avoid their fury. When the interest of God or of truth required it, he never shrunk from danger or persecution: but he prudently retires when his duty does not urge him to expose himself to sufferings. He departs then for Galilee, between which and Judea lay the province of Samaria, through which he was therefore obliged to pass. The first city at which he stopped was Sichar, the same as Sichem, so frequently mentioned in the Old Testament, as the metropolis of the tribe of Ephraim. It was situated at the foot of Mount Gerizim; and though it had been destroyed by Abimelech, had been rebuilt by Jeroboam, and made by him the capital of the kingdom of Israel. In its vicinity was a well, called *Jacob's well*, probably because this patriarch had caused it to be dug. There Jesus arrived about the sixth hour, fatigued with the toils of the day, and seated himself while his disciples went into the city to purchase food. He could easily have relieved his wants by miracle; but his miracles



he employed only for the relief of others. To himself he reserved only the painful but glorious privilege of serving as a perfect model of patience and resignation.

While he was there alone, a woman, who was a Samaritan both by birth and religion, approached. She came only to procure water, but she found the treasures of grace and the way to eternal life. She came to Jacob's well, and she found there the illustrious Shiloh, whom Jacob foretold. Jesus, oppressed with thirst, said to her, "Give me to drink." Supposing from his language or his habit that he was a Jew, and knowing the aversion that the Jews had for the Samaritans, she expressed to him her surprise that he should ask water from her to drink; "for," says the Evangelist, "the Jews have no dealings," no intercourse of friendship, "with the Samaritans." According to the Jewish teachers, a person of their nation was polluted, not only by eating and drinking with Samaritans, but even by touching them. It was indeed permitted to *buy* from them, as well as from the heathens, things necessary for the support of life, but to accept any thing from them as a present, was declared a heinous crime. But the mind of Jesus knew nothing of this narrow bigotry, this odious illiberality, which differences of religion and diversity of opinions had excited among the Jews. His object was to benefit all, and he therefore freely conversed with all. He therefore replied unto her, "If thou knewest the gift of God," if thou wert sensible what an opportunity the good providence of God now confers on thee, of receiving the greatest blessing that was offered thee, "and who it is that saith unto thee, give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water:"

meaning by this expression, that grace which at once cleanses the soul, and quenches its thirst for felicity. The Saviour, as you must have frequently remarked, often seizes upon passing incidents and objects before the eyes of his hearers, to shadow forth spiritual truths. Thus, when he saw a multitude of people following him, because they had been miraculously fed in the desert by the multiplication of the loaves, he spoke of himself as “the bread which cometh down from heaven and giveth eternal life.” In like manner, being at Jerusalem, at the feast of tabernacles, when the people in crowds drew water from the pool of Siloam, he cried out with a loud voice, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” Thus also, seeing the Samaritan woman solely occupied with the water which she was drawing, he takes occasion from it to elevate her thoughts to heaven.

Still supposing, however, that Jesus referred to common water, she objects to him that he has no mode of obtaining this water of which he spoke, since he had nothing by which he could draw it from Jacob’s well: and since to suppose that he could elsewhere find better water, would imply that he was greater than Jacob, who esteemed this the best in all the territory of Sichem.

Jesus, pitying her ignorance, and bearing with her weakness, began more fully to explain the properties of that water of which he spoke: “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into eternal life.”

Let us pause a moment, to meditate on this just

and impressive representation of the nature and effects of the grace of God.

1. It is like water *cleansing* the soul and the life from their pollution and defilement. Before we are renewed by it, we present to the eye of God and of all holy intelligences the most loathsome spectacle: but when these living waters, which flow from the fountain of grace and holiness, the Spirit of God, pass through it, this pollution vanishes. The *guilt* of sin which blackened it, is washed away; the *dominion* of sin which corrupted it, is destroyed. Instead of the unholy principles which formerly governed it, its inclinations are pure and holy, its delights high and heavenly; and (to use the scripture expression) it "is glorious within." It shines with a splendour far exceeding that of the high priest's robe and breastplate, adorned as they were with precious stones. The rays of the Sun of Righteousness, which now beam upon it, eclipse the lustre of the natural sun when shining in his greatest strength. Grace not only thus cleanses the soul, but also the whole man. "Not my feet only," cried Peter ignorantly, "but also my hands and my head." With greater propriety does the soul that has been purified by this living water, cry out, "Not my heart, not my head only, but my hands and my feet, make me wholly and entirely pure."

Grace is like water, as it *quenches* that raging thirst for felicity which is implanted in the human soul. Panting after happiness, we rove from object to object, still disappointed, but still hoping to be hereafter more fortunate. Grace leads us to the streams which flow from the throne of God; we find there the well-spring of joy; we find where all fulness dwells; and lose that relish for created and finite

objects which tormented us and filled us with disquiet.

2. Grace is a *well* of water springing up in the soul. It is not like water poured upon our bodies, which washes them and runs off; it is a cleansing principle within the soul itself. The drop from God becomes a fountain in man; religion is not altogether outward; it must take its origin from this abiding principle in the soul itself.

3. Grace is heavenly in its tendency. This well of water springs up unto eternal life. Give to the soul that has this divine principle all that the world can afford, still it cannot fix, or settle, or rest there. It seeks still a higher good; it rests satisfied with nothing but heaven. I know that the soul may for some time be clogged in its flight, but it will at last shake off these clogs; I know that the streamings of this fountain may be dammed, but it will burst these restraints, and will still spring upward, until in heaven it mingle itself with the ocean of love and holiness.

Why should we not more assiduously seek this grace? While the men of the world are pursuing with such avidity those enjoyments which cannot satisfy, shall we be inattentive to the invitations of Christ?

“Whosoever shall drink of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.” We return to our history. The woman still taking the words in a natural sense, was disposed to turn them into ridicule, and she begged the Saviour by all means to give her some of that excellent water, which by preventing her from ever thirsting again, would render it unnecessary for her to come so far again to draw water. “She saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I

thirst not, neither come hither to draw." To check her impertinence, Jesus shows that he was perfectly acquainted with her character, for he bade her call her husband; and when she replied that she had none, he told her that she had had five husbands, and was then living in adultery with a man who was not hers, but another's husband. What wisdom, what prudence, what charity, in the mode that the Saviour adopts to restrain her impertinence, and lead her to confess, and forsake her sin! "I have no husband," said she. This was true; but in acknowledging a part of the truth, she adroitly concealed the rest. Could she confess to a stranger, whom she did not know, the irregularities of her life? But, on the other hand, could she conceal them from Him to whom the darkness is as the light? Thus the Lord, profiting by her answer, teaches her that he was not ignorant of the most secret transactions of her life. He does this, not to load her with reproaches, and cover her with confusion, but to lead her to repentance.

This reproof, openly given by a stranger, a Jew, and therefore apparently an enemy, would have irritated many sinners. Some would have replied by abusive language. Others would have denied the charge, especially as it did not appear probable that this unknown person could convict them. But the Samaritan has different sentiments, and serves as a commentary on that declaration of our Lord, that the publicans and sinners were nearer the kingdom of heaven than the pharisees, who were so devout in their external appearance. There are specious vices on which remonstrances have little effect, whilst those that are attended by shame, yield and are humbled under the voice of reproof. The most

just reproaches, the most merited censures, only offended the pharisees: whilst the Samaritan woman, covered with confusion, at the view of her irregularities, which the Lord presents to her, humbles herself before him; and full of esteem, and veneration for him, concludes that he certainly had intercourse with heaven. "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet."

Happy to find a person of this character, she proposes to him the principal question in dispute between the two nations. This was, whether Mount Gerizim, or Jerusalem was the place appointed for worship and sacrifice. The Samaritans declared for Gerizim because it was in their country, and because Abraham and Jacob, whom they called their fathers, had built altars upon it. The Jews, resting on the express decision of the sacred volume, declared for Jerusalem. Jesus decides the question in favour of the Jews; but at the same time informs her, that a dispensation of religion was now beginning, under which all languages, countries, and places, being sanctified, men were to worship God, not in Jerusalem, but in *Spirit*; by offering the sacrifice, not of beasts, but of themselves, to love and obey him in all things, which is the *truth* of worship, the thing signified by every sacrifice and service enjoined in the law; and what alone was acceptable to the Father, even under the legal dispensation. "The hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him." The Saviour proceeds, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Being the Supreme Intelligence, who by one act, sees the thoughts of all other intelligences, he must

be served, not merely with sacrifices and external rites, but with the sentiments of the heart, with faith, and with love.

The woman, on hearing these instructions, without disputing with Jesus, but also without entirely acquiescing in what he had said, refers to the coming of the Messiah the entire decision of the question she had proposed to Jesus as a prophet. "I know that Messiah cometh; when he is come he will teach us all things." Jesus, seeing the dispositions of her heart, knowing that she was ready to renounce her sins, and believe in him, replied, "I that speak unto thee am he."

At this time the disciples returned, and interrupted the conversation. Though full of Jewish prejudices, they were astonished to see him familiarly talking with a Samaritan woman, and instructing her; yet none of them presumed to find fault with his conduct. The woman, in the mean time, on hearing Jesus call himself the Messiah, went immediately into the city to inform the inhabitants of the circumstances which had just taken place. Full of wonder and curiosity, they in crowds accompanied her to see Jesus.

While these events were passing, the disciples set before him the food they had brought. But exhausted as he was, he did not regard it. His mind was fixed on other and more important objects; and referring to the satisfaction he was about to receive from the conversion of the Samaritans, he said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." When his disciples, understanding him in a natural sense, asked one another whether any one had brought him food during their absence, he replied, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his

work." How beautiful, and how just a representation of the character of Jesus! The work assigned him as Mediator was, to reveal the will of God, and to save mankind by his own obedience unto death. Did he not show that it was his meat to do this will, by engaging in it with fervent affection, with indefatigable diligence, with undaunted courage? With *affection*. Nothing could exceed the delight with which he *undertook* this task; nothing the zeal with which he *accomplished* it. Whether we view his private addresses to God, or his public ministrations among men, we shall see that in him was that prophecy accomplished, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." With *diligence*. From the commencement of his ministry to the end of it, not a day was unemployed. Frequently after having laboured all the day, he spent the night in prayer, and resumed his labours with the returning light. Like the sun in the firmament, he proceeded in one steady course, nor ever ceased from his work till he could say, "It is finished." With *resolution*. What continual opposition did he endure! From the very first discourse that he uttered till the hour of his crucifixion, his enemies never ceased to seek his life. Yet did he persevere in the face of every danger, and at last complete his obedience, by surrendering up his life upon the cross.

Behold your model, Christians. We have also a work to do for God. It is great: but oh! how different from that which was committed to our Lord! We have not to satisfy the demands of justice, or to endure the wrath due for sin. Blessed be God! *that* was the Redeemer's work, and it has been finished by him on our behalf. The work that we have to do is to believe in Christ, and from a sense of his love,



to devote ourselves unreservedly to his service. Let it become *our meat* to do it. Let us engage in it *heartily*; a lukewarm service is unacceptable, nay, hateful to God. Let us be fervent in spirit, while we serve the Lord. *Uniformly*. It is not an occasional act of zeal that will please God, but a steady, conscientious, uniform discharge of our duty. *Courageously*. We may perhaps meet with reproach, if we set out in earnest to seek the Lord; but wo to us, if we draw back through the fear of man. Let us take up our cross daily, after Christ's example, and suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together.

Whilst Jesus thus spoke to his disciples, the Samaritans, who had been struck with the representation of the woman, were approaching. Jesus, seeing them disposed to believe, pointed to them and said, "Say not ye, there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest." That is, do not now use the proverbial expression employed at the time of sowing. Do not suppose that in spiritual matters, a long time must always intervene before the harvest. The seed was sown but a few hours ago: behold a multitude ready for harvest, disposed to believe.

## SERMON XLII.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. IX.



HEALING THE NOBLEMAN'S SON—PREACHING AT NAZARETH  
—RESIDENCE AT CAPERNAUM.

JOHN iv. 43—54. LUKE iv. 16—30. MATTHEW iv.  
13—23.

IN reading the lives of those ancient or modern heroes, whom poets, and orators, and historians have celebrated, we sometimes admire their fortitude, their bravery, and skill; but we are much oftener shocked at the methods which they employed to aggrandize themselves, and to secure renown. We are ready to weep, when we behold them raising their trophies on the ruins of slaughtered nations; we are compelled to regard them as the scourges of mankind, when we see their proud laurels wet with the blood of thousands slain by their means, and moistened with the anguished tears of countless widows and orphans, who have suffered a bereavement worse than death. How different are our feelings, as we prosecute the life of Jesus! Here we meet with nothing that does not give delight to the benevolent heart. Trace him through all his ministry; you will never find him unattended by mercy, by compassion, by love to man. *Here*, you will behold

the eyes, on which he has just poured the light of day, gazing upon him with wonder, with gratitude, and joy: *there*, you will perceive the ears, which he has just unstopped, drinking in, with eagerness and attention, the accents of heavenly wisdom and grace which fall from his lips. *Here*, the withered hands that he has restored are stretched forth to proclaim his praises, and the feet that he has strengthened leap for joy: *there*, the tongues that he has loosed declare their thankfulness, and those whom he had dispossessed of devils sit with composure before him. *Here*, the sick rise from the bed of languor and disease, and are restored to their anxious relatives and friends: *there*, Death himself hears the voice of the Son of God, and drops the chains with which his prisoners are bound, and permits them again to spring into life. What joy is conveyed to the heart by contemplating such a character! How great does Jesus appear in these displays of his mercy! Who would not desire to have such a Saviour for his friend?

These reflections are naturally excited by the next event that occurs in our Lord's history, and by the account which the Evangelist gives of the manner in which he was employed during that period which we are now to consider.

After spending two days in Sychar, where many of the Samaritans believed on him, Jesus went down into Galilee, where many attended his ministry with proper dispositions, having been convinced of his divine mission by the miracles they had seen him perform at Jerusalem during the passover. Among other places, he came to Cana, where he had formerly changed the water into wine. This was situated a day's journey from Capernaum, at which lat-

ter place the son of a nobleman, of the court of Herod Antipas, lay at the point of death. Full of anxiety for his child, the nobleman came to Cana to beseech Jesus to go down with him to heal his son, supposing that the personal presence of the Saviour was necessary to effect a cure. Jesus replied to him, "*Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe;*" i. e. 'The Samaritans, whom I have just left, were so moved by the holiness and excellency of my doctrine, as to believe on me; but on you Jews, nothing but the greatest miracles will have any effect.' The nobleman, not discouraged by this reproof, and full of tender concern for his son, whose case he thought would bear no delay, replied, "*Sir, come down ere my son die.*" Jesus, pleased with his faith, notwithstanding he weakly supposed the Saviour could not heal his son at a distance, answered, "*Go thy way; thy son liveth.*" 'There is no need of my attending you; I can heal your child here as well as if I were with him; return home in peace, for at this present moment he is perfectly recovered.' The nobleman, believing the declaration of Jesus, departed, and on the road was met by some of his servants, who told him that his son was recovered. Inquiring of them the hour when he began to grow better, they informed him that, instead of mending by degrees, "yesterday at the seventh hour," the fever suddenly left him, and he was restored to perfect health in an instant. Finding that this was the very moment when Jesus pronounced his cure, and struck with the power and goodness of his benefactor, the nobleman "believed, and his whole house."

1. This event, my brethren, is full of instruction. It teaches us, *the effect which personal or domestic troubles ought to have upon us.* We are all of us exposed

to afflictions. Your experience has shown you that every child of Adam must expect to have his heart torn by personal griefs, or the distresses of those whom he loves. Earthly greatness, we see from the example in our text, is no defence against them; disease and death enter the gates of the nobleman, as well as of the beggar. But these afflictions, painful as they are to nature, are sent in love, and may be eminently serviceable to us. When every thing smiles around us, we are apt to forget our God, to neglect our Saviour, and to look to the earth as the source of our happiness. Affliction cries to us, "This is not your rest." Affliction dries up the sources of earthly enjoyments that we may be led to the fountain of living waters. Had not the son of this nobleman been sick, his own soul and the souls of his family would, perhaps, have remained for ever in ignorance and unbelief; and, doubtless, he blessed God while he was on earth, and blesses God still, for that affliction which was the means of bringing him to an acquaintance with Jesus, and an experience of his grace. Like him, let your trials drive you to Cana to seek Christ, and "the water of sorrow shall be changed into the wine of gladness."

2. This history shows us *the effects even of a weak faith, and the benefits attached to it.* How weak was the faith of this nobleman, compared with that of the good centurion! He cried, "Master, come not under my roof, for I am not worthy; only speak the word, and my servant shall be healed:" whilst the nobleman limits the power of Jesus, and supposes that he cannot heal his son at a distance. Yet, imperfect as was his faith, it induced him to go to Jesus, and to apply to him with humility and respect. It prevailed in obtaining the mercy for which he ask-

ed. It is always thus, my brethren. The weakest faith, if it be sincere, will lead us to Jesus with reverence and humility, and make us urgent with him for his benefits. The smallest degree of true faith will surely bring the pardon of our sins, and every thing necessary for salvation; and will be nurtured and confirmed by the conduct of Jesus to us.

3. *Let us never attempt to prescribe to the Lord the mode in which he should work.* He knows best how to deal with his people. He went to the centurion's house, because *he* was humble and believing; he refused to go to the nobleman's, that he might more effectually check *his* pride and unbelief. Thus he may pursue various methods with us; but in all things he will act with consummate wisdom. Let us then commit ourselves to him, saying, "*When thou wilt, and what thou wilt, and as thou wilt.*" In this way we shall have our minds composed, and our thoughts established; and though he may lead us, as he did the Israelites, by a tedious and circuitous path, we shall find at last that it was "the right way."

4. *Let the goodness of the Lord to us induce us to strive to bring others to him.* This nobleman, doubtless, related to his family all that Jesus had spoken to him, and was instrumental in bringing them to believe on him. And shall not *we* make this improvement of his mercies vouchsafed to *us*? Shall we not exhort those over whom we have influence to trust in his word? Surely, if we express a concern for their bodily welfare, we should be no less solicitous for the salvation of their souls; and if we have found the benefit of believing in him ourselves, we should labour that all around us may be partakers of that benefit. By telling of his goodness, we shall pay that tribute which he expects at our hands, and antici-

pate that employment in which we hope to be occupied to all eternity.

Having remained some time in the other cities of Galilee, Jesus came to Nazareth, the town in which he was educated. Here, he went, as was his custom, to the synagogue on the Sabbath-day, and stood up to read the Scripture. The book, of which a portion was that day to be read, was the prophecy of Isaiah. On opening it, the Saviour was directed to a remarkable passage, which clearly foretold himself, and emphatically described his office. This place was the beginning of the sixty-first chapter, where Jesus read these words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." As soon as he had read this passage, he returned the book to the ruler of the synagogue, and, according to the custom of the Jewish doctors, who always preached sitting, sat down to instruct the people. Their eyes were fastened on him, when he told them that this prophecy was that day fulfilled in their ears. This assertion he proved in a sermon of considerable length, the subject of which only is mentioned by Luke, though at the same time he leads us to think of the sermon itself; for he tells us that all the congregation "bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth." And shall not we, too, my brethren, be filled with wonder, with gratitude, and with trust in him, at hearing these consolatory words? Listen to him, mourning soul, that art lamenting thy misery. and

trembling at thy danger; listen to him, and let the accents of grief be changed into the song of praise. “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon him:*” the Holy Spirit, “given to him without measure,” anointed and commissioned him with full power to relieve every distressed sinner that should apply to him for salvation. He acts not without authority; he was solemnly inaugurated into his office by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon him; and you may therefore confidently rely upon him. Are you a *poor*, afflicted sinner? He brings glad tidings of great joy to you; he was ordained *to preach the gospel to the poor*, to the poor in this world and to the poor in spirit. Is your heart broken and contrite, under a sense of your unworthiness and vileness, your guilt, and your danger? He is sent *to heal the broken-hearted*. Are you in bondage to sin, to Satan, and the law? He is sent *to preach and give deliverance to the captives*. Are you complaining of your ignorance in spiritual things, and of the darkness of your understandings? He is sent *to give recovering of sight to the blind*. Are your souls in as miserable a condition as persons that are galled and bruised with fetters and chains? He is sent *to set at liberty those that are bruised*. Lift up thine head, then, mourning soul; an offer of deliverance from all thy miseries is made unto thee. Christ is appointed by God, and has a divine commission, to supply all thy wants. Only believe in him, and thou shalt be safe and happy. “Arise, then, and sing, thou that sittest in the dust; put off thy sackcloth, and gird thee with gladness.”

Jesus, knowing that, notwithstanding the attention which was paid to his discourse, there were some objections against him lurking in the minds of his hearers, anticipated these objections, and proceeded to give an answer to them. The first was derived



from his residence among them ; in answer to which he observed, that prophets were not generally received in their own country, since those who had known them as equals were averse to submit to them in their prophetic character. They were also displeased that he had performed no miracle in their town, and especially none like that which they had heard he had performed at Capernaum, in healing the nobleman's son who was in Cana. They supposed that, since their townsman was possessed of such powers, there ought not to be a diseased person in Nazareth. "*Ye will surely say to me, Physician, heal thyself: whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do thou here in thine own country:*" i. e. Since thou art possessed of such miraculous powers, that thou canst cure sick people at a distance, in thine absence thou oughtest to have healed the sick of this city, in which thou hast been brought up, rather than of any other town; as it is expected of the physician, that he will bestow the healing virtues of his art upon his friends and relations, rather than upon strangers. In reply to this objection, our Lord teaches them that God exercises a holy sovereignty in the dispensation of his favours, conferring them not as to man appears most proper, but as to himself seems good; that the prophets of the Lord often wrought miracles, not for those who supposed that they had the best right to them, but even for the poor and despised Gentiles; that thus Elijah relieved the heathen widow of Sarepta, whilst many widows in Israel were left to starve; that thus Elisha healed Naaman the Syrian, while many Jewish lepers were uncleansed.

How uncertain and transient is popular applause! However just may be the grounds of the praise that is bestowed, the smallest circumstance is sufficient

to obliterate all remembrance of a person's merits, and render him an object of general indignation. The same people who just were hanging on the lips of the Saviour with delight, and "wondering at the gracious words which proceeded from his mouth," immediately rose against him on hearing these declarations; and forgetting the sanctity of the sabbath, and the holiness of the place, tumultuously forced him from the synagogue, and rushed with him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. As the time of his death had not yet arrived, and as this was not the manner in which it was foretold he should suffer, he withdrew himself from them, probably by rendering himself invisible.

Departing from these ungrateful people, he went to reside at Capernaum, a large city of Upper Galilee, situate on the lake of Gennesareth, (otherwise called the sea of Tiberias, and the sea of Galilee,) on the borders of Zebulon and Naphtali. The whole country about this place was uncommonly fertile and populous. By remaining here for some time the doctrines of the Saviour might be extensively propagated, his miracles publicly wrought, and the many strangers who frequented the trading towns on the lake might carry with them to their own countries the knowledge of the gospel, and prepare their fellow-citizens to receive it at a future period. By the Saviour's residence there, the Evangelist informs us, a prediction contained in the ninth chapter of Isaiah was fulfilled, "*The land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtalim, by the way of the sea beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles : the people which sat in darkness saw great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up.*" The word *darkness* is figu-

ratively used in scripture to signify ignorance and misery. In this *ignorance* all mankind are enveloped on whom the light of revelation has not shone. Numberless truths intimately connected with our dearest interests cannot be discovered by unassisted reason. The Sun of Righteousness must display them to us. To the inhabitants of Galilee a dawning of his appearance had been visible in the promises, in the prophetic writings, and in the Mosaic ritual; but he now began (if I may speak so) to rise above the horizon, clearly to illumine Galilee, and to dispel the clouds of ignorance and error. This people was also in *misery*, "sitting in the region and shadow of death," on the very confines of destruction. But Jesus pointed to them the path which conducted from this gloomy region to peace, to joy, to salvation.

For some time the Saviour remained at Capernaum, embracing every opportunity of instructing the people, and saying to them as John the Baptist had before done, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" 'The kingdom of Messiah is about to be established; the last dispensation, the final discovery of the will of God to mankind is about to be made. In this dispensation, mere ceremonial or external observances are not sufficient. Repent of your former evil thoughts and ways; turn to God from all your iniquities; or you cannot enjoy the privileges and immunities of this kingdom of grace and of glory.'

Jesus, however, did not confine himself entirely to Capernaum, but made frequent excursions into the neighbouring country. On one occasion, intending to take a larger circuit than usual, he wished that his disciples should accompany him, to witness his miracles, and be more fully instructed in his doc-

trines. Going out therefore to the lake, he observed two of them, Simon and Andrew, casting their nets. He immediately addressed them, and bade them follow him. In like manner he required the attendance of two other brethren, James and John. His word was accompanied with such energy and power on their minds, that they immediately complied with his command. This call was only temporary, and must not be confounded with that which took place in the next year of our Saviour's ministry, when twelve of his disciples were selected as his apostles, and "chosen to be with him alway."

These four disciples accompanied the Saviour through the different parts of Galilee, where he went to preach. The Evangelists do not tell us what precise time was spent in this tour, nor what were the particular events which occurred in it. They only inform us, in general, that he wrought so many beneficent miracles, that people crowded to him from Galilee, from Decapolis, (a country which contained ten cities, and bordered upon Syria,) from Jerusalem, from Judea, and from beyond Jordan; nay, that his fame was spread even through the heathen country of Syria: "and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those which had the palsy, and he healed them."

Let us conclude this discourse with a single reflection. Though Jesus is no longer upon earth, healing the bodies of men, yet there is a striking analogy between the spiritual cures which he now operates and the bodily cures which he formerly wrought. We have not time to consider the resem-

blance in all its parts, but it is uniformly striking. *With what sentiments* did the diseased persons go to our Lord for healing? They went *sensible of their disorder*; they went with *humility*, prostrating themselves on the ground before him, and acknowledging the insufficiency of all other means for their recovery. They went *with earnestness*; they came often from afar, they would take no denial, and in vain were they urged by the multitude to hold their peace. They went *with faith*, believing that he was able and willing to heal them. Behold the sentiments which we must have if we desire him to heal our souls. We must *feel* and lament our spiritual wants; we must with *humility* acknowledge that we can obtain relief from no one else, and that our entire dependence is upon him; we must with *earnestness* not only seek but strive, determining to take the kingdom of heaven by a holy violence; we must exercise *faith* on him, believing that he is able and willing to save unto the uttermost those that come unto God by him.

Though the Lord used *various methods* of healing their disorders, yet they are all paralleled in the modes which he employs in healing the diseases of the soul. Sometimes he wrought the cure *instantaneously*, as in the sick man at the pool of Bethesda; and the same sudden change has been produced in the hearts of many, who have been made to cry out, with the first converts and the jailer, "What must I do to be saved?" At other times he performed his cures *gradually*, as in the blind man, who at first saw "men as trees walking." Thus he often carries on his work, in a gradual manner, in our souls, leading us from progressive conviction to thorough conver-

sion. Sometimes he healed the people *secretly*, as when he took the deaf man aside from the multitude, and opened his ears, and charged him to tell no one. And he has also many "hidden ones," in whose hearts he carries on a secret work, and heals them without attracting the notice of the world. At other times he performed the cures *openly*, and in the sight of all; as when he bade the man with the withered hand stand forth. So he often converts the souls of profligate sinners in such a striking manner as to fill all around them with wonder and amazement. Sometimes he *used means* in curing them, as in the blind man on whose eyes he put clay, as he now converts many by the preaching of the gospel. Sometimes he *used no means*, as in the case of the ten lepers, who were cleansed as they were going on their way; and so he sometimes imparts the knowledge of himself by the teachings of his Spirit, without using any particular means or instrument to convey it. But however varied was his manner in these respects, in one circumstance it was uniformly the same: whomsoever he cured, he cured *perfectly*. And thus he always carries on to perfection the work which he has begun in the souls of men.

## SERMON XLIII.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. X.



SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

MATTHEW V.

HITHERTO we have beheld our Saviour preparing men for the reception of his gospel by general exhortations to repentance, and establishing the authority of his mission by miraculous cures. We are now to contemplate him announcing a sublimer, and purer morality than the world had ever known, and pointing out the path which leads to felicity on earth, and to happiness beyond the grave. His fame had now become so great that a vast concourse of people attended him. He was touched with pity at considering their ignorance, and ascended a mountain, and seated himself on an eminence, whence he might be distinctly heard, in order to instruct them. From a mountain the law of Moses was given; from a mountain the new law of grace was announced. There were not here, as on Sinai, thunderings, and darkness, and tempest. In conformity with the milder economy which Jesus Christ came to establish, every thing was gentle and unappalling. "His doctrine dropped as the rain; his speech distilled as the dew;

as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.”

Let us review this sermon of our Lord, of Him who “taught with authority,” explaining the several parts of it in more or fewer words, as may be required.

He begins with a subject which has always warmly engaged the attention and care of the world, viz. the way to true happiness. The majority of mankind have always sought for felicity from riches, from pleasures, from honours. Jesus, on the contrary, teaches us that happiness is seated in the heart, and results from the exercise of the graces of the Spirit.

“*Blessed are the poor in spirit ; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” The proud, and the great, who are elated with a high opinion of their own perfections, and whose hearts are attached to the earth, the riches and splendours of which they eagerly pursue, are not to be esteemed happy: but those who are humble and lowly-minded, who are sensible of their unworthiness, and their frailty ; who are weaned from this world ; who prefer righteousness before wealth and honour ; who, if they are poor in this world, are satisfied with the disposals of God’s providence, and humbly submit to his will ; or, who, if they have wealth, value it no more than it deserves ; and if they occupy high stations, are lowly in mind. These are the *poor in spirit*, and they are truly blessed ; since they have an interest in the kingdom of grace here, and are prepared for the kingdom of glory hereafter.

“*Blessed are they who mourn ; for they shall be comforted.*” Those are not to be esteemed happy, who live in voluptuousness, in merriment, and gayety, but those who mourn with contrite hearts, and broken spirits, under a sense of their sin, and of the misery



to which it has exposed them. Their wounded spirits shall be healed. Having sown in tears, they shall reap in joy; they shall, in due season, be revived by the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit, and shall enter, beyond the grave, upon the everlasting joy of their Lord. And blessed in general are those who endure afflictions of any kind with an humble submission to the Divine Providence; who, by their sorrows, are convinced of the vanity of earth, are excited to amend their lives, and to seek for a better country. God will support them under their trials, give them here an inward tranquillity, which outward sorrows cannot impair, and at last bring them to the fruition of delights unspeakable.

*“Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.”* The Saviour here alludes to the words of David, in the thirty-seventh Psalm: “Yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be, but the meek shall inherit the earth.” This promise, in the Old Testament, referred to a quiet possession of the land of Canaan; but Jesus Christ uses it in a sublimer and nobler sense. Meekness is manifested by our conduct both to God and man. It is displayed towards God by quietly bowing to his holy and sovereign will in all things, without murmuring or repining. It is displayed towards our fellow-men by affability, gentleness, and patience; by an exemption from passion and violence, haughtiness and turbulence; by a difficulty to be provoked, and an easiness to be appeased. Happy are those who are of this character. By the providence of God, and according to the common course of things, he will find friends and protectors, and generally enjoy quietly his possessions, with the good will of God and man, and with the greatest tranquillity of conscience, and shall at

last have an inheritance in that world where peace and righteousness dwell for ever.

*“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness ; for they shall be filled.”* Those are happy who feel their need of that everlasting righteousness which the Messiah came into the world “to bring in” for the justification of the sinner, and of that righteousness of heart and life which he requires of his followers, and who desire and seek these things with as much earnestness as a man oppressed by hunger and thirst employs to satisfy his natural appetites. They shall not be disappointed ; they shall have the desire of their hearts. The righteousness of Jesus shall be imputed to them for their justification, and his Holy Spirit shall renew their souls.

*“Blessed are the merciful ; for they shall obtain mercy.”* They are happy, who, on true, evangelical principles, exercise compassion ; being ready to succour the afflicted, and to forgive the offending. They shall obtain mercy both from God and man, according to their wants.

*“Blessed are the pure in heart ; for they shall see God.”* They are happy, whose hearts are free from hypocrisy and uncleanness, from “all filthiness both of the flesh and spirit.” They shall be favoured with special manifestations from God in this world, and shall hereafter “see him as he is.”

*“Blessed are the peace-makers ; for they shall be called the children of God.”* Envy not those warriors and conquerors, who, to obtain fame, have carried bloodshed and slaughter through the world. Far happier is the occupation of those who study to compose contention and discord, to extinguish wrath and malice, and to promote universal concord, forbearance, benevolence, and peace. Imitating the most

glorious perfections of the divine nature, goodness and love, God will acknowledge them as his children, and they must be happy; happy in a resemblance to the God of peace, and in those blessings which he will confer upon them.

“*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” Esteem not external ease and liberty blessings, when purchased by the sacrifice of the conscience. Happier far is he, who, for the sake of God, cheerfully foregoes all the outward comforts of life; professes his faith and hope with courage and constancy in the midst of persecution, and is not to be deterred from his duty by the keenest sufferings. Such shall receive an ample and distinguished reward in the life which is to come. With propriety, therefore, did the Saviour add, “*Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*”

Such is our Lord’s doctrine concerning happiness. Before we further examine his discourse, let us make some remarks on the part we have considered.

Though our Saviour here annexes blessedness and eternal felicity to the practice of single virtues, yet we must remember that these promises are made on a supposition that we do not neglect other parts of our duty. To think otherwise; to imagine that by attending to one virtue we might be exempted from the performance of others, is equally contrary to reason and religion. “Whosoever shall keep the whole law,” says St. James, “and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” And yet how many are there, who are guilty of this folly? This man ex-

pects the favour of God, because he is honest and upright in his dealings. That one, because he is liberal to the poor, whilst the duties of religion are entirely forgotten; while love to God, communion with him, devotedness to him, repentance and faith, are overlooked or neglected. Another supposes that his heaven is sure because he is zealous in defence of the orthodox creed, attentive to the ordinances and rites of religion, while he violates the precepts of morality. Deceive not yourselves, my brethren. There is a mutual and indissoluble connexion between all the Christian virtues, and he that from proper principles, from a regard to the authority of God, and the constraining influence of the love of Christ, obeys one of them, must, from the same principles, obey them all.

Having thus explained the nature of felicity to his disciples, and pointed out to them their duty, Jesus teaches them that by their good example and sound doctrine, they were to keep the world from corruption, and season men's minds with a love of piety. "*Ye are the salt of the earth.*" And at the same time he warns them, that if they whose duty it was to reform others become wicked themselves, they will be the most useless and despicable of men. "*But if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be thrown out, and trodden under foot of men.*" The allusion made in these words to insipid salt, is explained by several eastern travellers, particularly by *Maunderell*, who, in his journey to Jerusalem, mentions, that "he broke off from a small precipice in the valley of salt, a piece exposed to the sun, rain, and air; which, though it had the sparks and particles of salt, yet had perfectly lost its savour. This salt, in some places.

was so plentiful, as not only to be thrown out on the paths and highways, but used for repairing them."

The Saviour next compares them to a light set up to lead men from error to knowledge, from vice to religion; and bids them remember that the conduct of men in eminent situations will be narrowly observed; and that the knowledge of divine things was given to them by inspiration, not that it should be concealed, but that it might be manifested to the world. "*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house.*" So, also, adds he, "*let your light shine before men that they may glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" This precept is of so much consequence; the observation of it is so intimately connected with the progress of religion in any place, that we must pause a moment to make some brief observations upon it. It enjoins that the holiness and piety of Christians should not be secret, and known only to God and themselves, but be visible and open, and thus calculated to lead men to the love and practice of religion. The Saviour does not speak merely of the light of knowledge, a light often without heat, but of the light of a holy life which shines only to warm. Whilst on earth, he was himself, by his life and example, as well as by his doctrines, the light of the world. He requires that his disciples should, in their measure, be such after him. When the sun sets, it leaves behind it the planets and the stars, which still illuminate the world, though with a feebler light. Thus our Sun of Righteousness, who was not always to remain upon earth, required his followers, who had received some participation of his light, to illumine the world after

him, to show men the way to glory, and by a public display of their religion, to serve as guides to them in the midst of their darkness. The Christian ought to act thus uniformly. Before men, before all men, our light should shine. Every where he ought to be the same. Holiness, reverence for God, and a zeal for his glory, ought every where to attend him. If he has his moments of relaxation, they ought never to make him forget the dignity of his character, the sublimity of his destination. His religion ought not to be a dress reserved for certain days and certain occasions, and not commonly to be worn. Every where, in public and in private, before the wicked and the good, his light should shine. Ah, Christians! is this our conduct? and if it be not, what cause have we to suspect, if not the sincerity, at least the strength of our graces! Can a heart, full of God, a soul burning with divine love, fail to manifest what it feels? The greater part of our time is spent in the intercourse and commerce of civil life; is it possible that here we never show what we are, and neglect so many opportunities of edifying our brethren? "*The tree is known by its fruits,*" says our Lord. I know there is a season when it produces no fruits, but it is the period of winter; and it is a chill winter with the soul when it produces nothing external, when it remains barren, and displays neither leaves nor fruits. Let us then awake, Christians, to a compliance with this precept. The interest of our neighbour, the glory of God, the benefit of our own souls, demand it.

As the explanations of the moral precepts of the law, which the Saviour was about to give, were very different from those of the scribes and pharisees; and as the view which he gave of the spiritual nature

of Messiah's kingdom was opposite to that which they pretended to derive from the prophets; he proceeded to inform them that he came "*not to destroy, but to fulfil the law and the prophets;*" to accomplish what was typified, to explain what was obscure, and to complete what was imperfect; that every jot of the ceremonial law should be fulfilled, and every tittle of the moral law endure to the consummation of all things; that whoever weakened the obligation of the moral precepts, and taught others so to do, could not enter into heaven: while those who enforced their observance should be rewarded; and that the righteousness which would qualify us for an admission into the future glory, must be much more universal and sincere than that of the scribes and pharisees. (17—21.)

As this was a subject of the greatest importance, Jesus proceeded to mention various particulars in which his disciples must excel the doctrine and practice of the Jewish teachers. He particularly specifies murder, adultery, divorce, perjury, resentment of injuries, and benevolence. It was taught by the Jews, that the law, "Thou shalt not kill," prohibited nothing but actual murder. Jesus declares, that according to the intention and spirit of the law, causeless anger, derision, and contempt, were forbidden. "*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and, whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall be angry with his brother, without cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: and whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.*" That is, a disciple of Christ guilty of sinful anger, is subject to a future punish-

ment corresponding to the temporal one which among the Jews was inflicted by *the Judgment*, a court consisting of twenty-three elders and Levites, which had the power of life and death. But anger, bursting forth into words of derision and contempt, into charges of meanness, despicableness, and emptiness, (which are all implied in the term *Raca*,) exposes to a sentence like that awarded by the Great Council at Jerusalem, which took cognizance of higher matters. And anger still more unrestrained, so as to charge men causelessly with being wicked men and apostates, (for this is implied in the eastern word *Morch*, translated a fool,) incurs a still greater degree of punishment, answering to a death by fire in the valley of Hinnom, the greatest punishment inflicted among the Jews.

But because men are apt to fall into causeless anger, and to express this anger by contemptuous speeches and abusive names, imagining that there is little sin in this, and that it will easily be forgiven for some acts of devotion, Jesus declares that no external sacrifice would be accepted for them; that repentance and reparation were their only remedies. “*If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath ought against thee,*” any just cause of complaint, “*leave there thy gift before the altar; go thy way: first be reconciled to thy brother, then come and offer thy gift.*” This direction Jesus enforced from what is proper in ordinary lawsuits. In such cases, it is prudent for him who has done wrong to agree with his adversary before the sentence of the judge is interposed. And in like manner it becomes us, if we have injured our brother, to be reconciled to him, while we have an opportunity of repentance, and before the sentence of the supreme Judge be



passed upon us. “ *Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him, lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.*”

With respect to adultery, our Lord declares that unchaste desires and intentions render us guilty of it in the view of the divine law, and in the sight of God. That God who sees the heart, will punish all such evil intentions as want nothing but opportunity to become actual crimes.

The Saviour adds, “ *If thy right eye offend thee, (rather, cause thee to offend, or lead thee into sin,) pluck it out, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee.*” “ This is a strong eastern manner of expressing, that seductions to sin and stumbling-blocks in the way of duty, should be avoided at all events; and that the causes of guilt should be removed, whatever favourite gratifications were foregone, whatever temporal evils were endured. As you would lose an eye or a limb to prevent a death by fire, so let every thing most dear be sacrificed to prevent eternal death.”

With respect to divorce, which was common among the Jews for the most frivolous causes, Jesus declares, that nothing but adultery can render them lawful.

It was taught by the Jewish doctors, that oaths were obligatory only according to the nature of a thing by which a man swears; and that those which were not obligatory might be freely used in common conversation. In opposition to this, Jesus gives a

catalogue of some of the oaths which, in the opinion of these doctors, were not obligatory; and prohibits these and all other oaths in common conversation; and commands his disciples to maintain such sincerity and truth, that in order to gain belief they need only assert or deny a thing, without invoking the name of God. "Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths; but I say unto you, Swear not at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King; neither shalt thou swear by thy head, for thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be Yea, yea; nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."

The Saviour proceeds, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." Many commentators have endeavoured to show that these precepts, with proper limitations, oblige *all* Christians, at *all* times: That the import of them is merely this, that in matters not of great consequence we should rather suffer wrong than angrily repel it; that patience and submission ought to be shown in many instances of unreasonable treatment, instead of returning violence for violence; that this was particularly so in the case

which so often occurred at that time, of being obliged to attend public messengers; that, in general, liberality should be exercised to all men; that Christians should lend to the honest and industrious, as far as their duty to themselves and their families enables them; and, in unusually afflictive cases, hoping for nothing again.

But there is another mode of explaining these precepts, which appears to me much more natural. This discourse was addressed to the *disciples* of our Lord, in the presence of the multitude; disciples, whom he was about to send out as professors and propagators of a new religion, in which character they would meet with much opposition and persecution. A peculiar conduct was required of such men. Jesus, therefore, bids them to go forth, and display the power of religion by the most perfect acquiescence, under those personal injuries and temporal losses which they would often endure on a religious account; when judicially spoiled of their goods, gladly to suffer still further injustice for the name of Jesus; and when customary acts of oppression occurred, to show mildness instead of reluctance; so that after a compelled assistance, to give a voluntary one to the oppressor, instead of resenting the wrong. Being under the immediate care of God, they were to have no regard for the world, to take no thought for the morrow, and to lend, not only without usury, but without hoping for any thing again.

## SERMON XLIV.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XI.



THE LORD'S PRAYER.

MAT. vi. 9—14.

UNASSISTED reason is sufficient to convince us at once of the indispensable necessity of prayer, and of our need of a divine instructor to teach us to pray aright. Many of the pagans, on whom the sacred light of revelation never shone, were deeply persuaded of both these truths. They beheld man weighed down by afflictions which he could not remove, exposed to calamities which he could not avert, polluted by sins which he could not expiate, tyrannized by passions which he could not subdue; and they were convinced from this humiliating view of our condition, that it was both our duty and privilege to implore from heaven those numberless mercies which it alone could bestow. But on the other hand, they beheld man ignorant of the future, incompetent to judge what tends to his true felicity, seduced by his desires, panting after things that undo him. At this view, they felt that a heavenly light was requisite to direct us in our supplications. *Plato*, that celebrated Grecian philosopher, in one of his dialogues introduces *Socrates* conversing with

the most beloved of his pupils, and proving to him, that the ignorance of the wisest is so great, that man knows not what to request from heaven; that therefore he ought to use none but the most general petitions, until that time arrived, when a more illustrious and a heavenly teacher, whom he hoped God would send to men, should appear to enlighten their darkness, and teach them what favours they should ask from the Divinity.\*

My brethren, this heavenly teacher has appeared upon earth; the ardent desires of Socrates and of Plato have been fulfilled; Jesus Christ has not only opened a way for us to the throne of grace, he has also in the prayer that has just been read to you directed our requests, and dictated even our expressions. That supernatural instruction, the necessity of which was felt by pagans, is enjoyed by us: ought we not to receive it with gratitude? ought we not to use it with ardour? ought we not to employ it to cultivate in our hearts the principles of piety and virtue?

But that these beneficial effects may be attained from this prayer, it is necessary for us to understand its sense and import. Though all its expressions are simple, and its terms intelligible, yet it is frequently repeated without being understood. We learn it in our earliest years, when our understanding and our attention are both feeble; and many continue to repeat it in advanced age, without ever carefully inquiring into its sense; and *because* the expressions are simple, and the words familiar, the attention is never arrested, nor the mind employed to search into their meaning. It cannot therefore be a useless

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\* See Plato's second Alcibiades.

task to inquire what its divine Author intended to teach us in its several parts, that so we may address it to God with understanding, and in the exercise of those sentiments that are expressed in it.

It consists, as you know, of three parts: a preface, petitions, and a doxology.

The preface, "*Our Father, who art in heaven,*" brief as it is, presents the strongest encouragements to prayer, and is admirably adapted to awaken all those affections that will make us pray acceptably. Of all the magnificent titles invented by poets or philosophers, in honour of their gods, there is none which conveys so grand and lovely an idea as this simple name of Father. Can we say to God, *Our Father*, without feeling our hearts swell with *gratitude*, for all that goodness which this name brings to our remembrance; for that kindness which called us into being; for that protection and support which he hath ever given us; for that adoption through Jesus Christ, and renewal by his Spirit, by which Christians peculiarly become his children? Can we say to God, *Our Father*, without being animated by a tender confidence in his mercy; by a persuasion that he is ready to hear our reasonable requests, to give us all that is really good, and to avert from us all those evils which we may ignorantly desire; with a heartfelt joy that we are not obliged to address a severe and inexorable tyrant, or a cold, insensible stranger, unconnected with us, and indifferent to our necessities; but the kindest, the most affectionate, the most merciful of parents? Can we say to God, *Our Father*, without being inspired with a filial reverence, with a child-like fear of his displeasure, with a desire of obeying him in all things, with a zeal for his honour, and a wish to resemble him? Can the soul

remain unimpressed by a solemn awe, when it remembers that this our Father is *in heaven*, seated on a throne far above all height, possessed of unlimited power, and managing the universe at his pleasure? Can any care, or fear, or inquietude; can any thing inconsistent with the sublimest trust, agitate the soul of the believer, when he considers that God, *his Father*, pities his distresses, and desires his felicity; that God, his Father *in heaven*, can accomplish all his wishes, and give him a happiness beyond his thoughts or his hopes?

When such affections as these are excited in our hearts, our zeal, our love, our reverence must compel us to cry out, "*Hallowed be thy name.*"

The *name of God* means here God himself, his person, and his attributes. The expression is used in the same manner in numberless other places of holy scripture, where to *fear*, to *bless*, to *call upon the name of the Lord*, signify to *fear*, to *bless*, to *call upon the Lord*. Perhaps this peculiar phraseology resulted from a circumstance which you must often have noticed when perusing the Old Testament. We find there that when God made any remarkable promise to his people, or performed splendid miracles in their behalf, he very frequently took a particular name confirmative of this promise, or significative of these miracles. In consequence of this, it was natural that *God*, and the *name of God*, should be used as convertible terms. We hallow this name, that is, we sanctify, or glorify God, when we entertain in our hearts proper sentiments of his nature and perfections: when we consider him as infinitely removed from unrighteousness; as never beholding it in his creatures with approbation; as in no case the author of sin; as perfectly great, and just, and good. We

hallow this name, that is, we sanctify or glorify God, when we express these sentiments by our lips, and on all fit occasions praise and bless him. We hallow it when our lives correspond with these expressions of our lips, and these sentiments of the heart. When we utter this petition, then we pray that God may be revered, adored, and magnified by all intelligent creatures, and especially by men; that they never may think of him but with solemnity of soul; that they never may speak of him but with the profoundest veneration; that this humble and fervent devotion may animate all the homages that they pay to him, and may shine through their whole lives.

If we thus hallow the name of God; if we have this lively, effectual, and solemn belief of his holiness, his hatred of sin, his justice, and his goodness, we shall desire to become his subjects; we shall say with sincerity, "*Thy kingdom come.*" God is the sovereign of the universe. His sceptre extends over all the works of his hands, from the archangel that stands next his throne, to the imperceptible mote that floats in the air. To this his natural dominion the petition does not refer. This kingdom has endured since nature sprang into existence, and it will ever continue undisturbed. With regard to it we may say, with the Psalmist, "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice;" but we cannot say, "*Thy kingdom come.*" There is, however, another dominion exercised by God; that in which, by his Spirit and his gospel, he rules over the hearts of voluntary subjects. This dominion is unacknowledged by many of those who are under his natural government. We pray that it may be extended to all mankind, and have no other limits than the world.



But however glorious may be the kingdom of God upon the earth, it endures but for a time; however happy may be its subjects, they, like the rest of mankind, must submit to the stroke of death. But at this they repine not; for they know that in the regions of bliss, to which they pass through the tomb, the kingdom of the same God to whom they were in subjection below, flourishes in glory and perfection; they know that there they shall submit to his authority with still more entire devotion, and triumph in their king with still higher transports. To this final and complete establishment of the kingdom of God we ought to look forward when we say, "Thy kingdom come."

But how shall we obtain a share in this blissful kingdom? How shall we secure that acquittal of our Judge, "Come, ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world?" The Saviour himself informs us, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven." For this qualification he bids us to pray in the next petition, "*Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.*" There are two principal lights in which we may consider God; as the sovereign disposer of all events, and as our most holy ruler and lawgiver. When viewed in the first of these characters, we perform his will when we bear with resignation and suffer with patience whatever sorrows he sends us; when even under the severest strokes of his rod, we check the tears of impatience and the murmurs of despair, and exclaim in the words of our Saviour, "Not my will, but thine be done;" when submissive to the authority, and confident of the wisdom and goodness of our God, afflicted but

not rebellious, we say with Eli, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." But though in this petition we implore this temper of soul for ourselves and for all men, yet this is not its chief design. The blessed angels, who are here proposed for our examples, can have no opportunity of thus submitting to the will of God in a state where no affliction can ever assail them, no distress ever agitate the sacred tranquillity of their souls. But in that species of obedience to the will of God, which consists in performing the commandments that, as our lawgiver, he has given us, they serve as the most illustrious patterns to us. And though we can never, whilst on earth, attain to that perfection of obedience which distinguishes the angelic host, yet we ought to strive, as we here pray, that ourselves, and all men, by whom the earth is now inhabited, or who shall hereafter possess it, may perform the commands of God with so much readiness, universality, ardour, joy, and perseverance, that our obedience may become a lively, though imperfect image of that with which the blessed spirits execute the orders of their Lord.

Hitherto the petitions that our Saviour has prescribed are such, that the purest spirits could join with us in presenting them to our common Father. But the Saviour knew, that while we were on earth, it was necessary for us to form supplications unsuitable to the state of those happy and holy beings. These supplications are three, and refer to the three parts of our life: we are needy and dependent—we must then implore relief under our present temporal necessities. We are sinful—we must then seek from his mercy the remission of our past offences. We are frail—we must then desire grace from on high to arm us against our future temptations.

When we say to God, "*Give us this day our daily bread,*" we acknowledge that to his providence we are indebted for every thing, and we look to him for the supply of our temporal necessities, (for the word *bread* is to be taken in a sense thus extensive.) We do not implore what would satisfy luxury, or vanity, or covetousness, but what would satisfy a modest and reasonable mind. We request this, *day by day*, to testify our dependence upon God from one moment to another, and our willingness to be thus dependent.

Happy should we be, if our temporal necessities were the only ones from which we need seek deliverance: but, alas! there are other miseries under which we groan; miseries more oppressive, more formidable: these are our sins. Our Saviour, therefore, teaches us to add, "*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us.*" When we utter this petition, what should be our sentiments? We should have a deep persuasion of our guilt and unworthiness; we should feel that our transgressions deserve punishment from God, and that this punishment cannot be prevented except through his mercy; we should remember that all our hopes of the remission of our iniquities must be delusive, if rancour, enmity, or revenge, still are cherished in our hearts. "*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us:*" not that this single act of obedience will be sufficient to secure our final felicity, whilst we neglect the other precepts of the gospel, but to show us that without this we must lie down for ever under the weight of unpardoned sin.

The remembrance of our *past* sins must fill us with grief; but the anticipation of the *future* must also dis-

quiet and distress us. Surrounded on all sides by temptations; exposed to the assaults of the numerous and powerful enemies of our salvation; bearing within us a frail and treacherous heart, must we not fall each moment into sin, if the Supreme Arbiter of all events do not avert from us numberless dangers and seductions, if he do not communicate to us by his Spirit the strength requisite to enable us to resist those that assail us; if he do not deliver us from the attacks of evil, and secure us against the violence of the *evil one*; if he do not lead us by the hand every step that we take, on a road so slippery, and a path so surrounded by precipices? This is what we pray for, when we say, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Not that God ever allures and incites men to sin; to assert this would be the height of blasphemy; but because God, in the scripture style of speaking, is said to do that which he does not interpose to prevent; he is, therefore, said to lead us into temptation when he does not interfere to deliver us from evil; the evil of sin, or the power of the evil one.

After presenting these petitions to God, how can we better conclude our devotions than by acknowledging that his is the *kingdom*, the rightful authority and dominion over all his creatures; his the *power*, by which all our good deeds are performed, and all our happiness obtained; and that, therefore, his should be the *glory*, of all that we do, or possess, or hope for? And who is there, who, after listening to these supplications and homages, does not acquiesce in them with all his heart, and say, *Amen*?

Thus we have briefly reviewed this prayer of our Lord; let us now make some inferences from it.

1. The first three petitions have for their object the glory of God; the last three, the needs of man.

This arrangement teaches us, that *whatever concerns the glory of God should engage the first and most ardent desires of believers*, and that their own particular interests should ever be esteemed a subordinate object. This is a rule uniformly laid down in the holy volume. It is a rule, the justice of which must be acknowledged by every one, who has proper ideas of the greatness, the glory, and the rights of God; but, alas! it is a rule which is seldom observed; which is even seldom thought of. How small is the number of those who habitually ask themselves such questions as these: ‘Will these actions, these conversations, these plans, tend to the glory of God? By them will his name be hallowed, his kingdom come, his will be done?’ The most of men, animated only by selfish and interested motives, never thus raise their thoughts to heaven.

2. Another instruction. This prayer shows us that *brotherly love is the badge of the disciples of the Saviour*. He does not permit each of us, when praying for himself, to separate his interests from those of his brethren. He requires us to ask for them the same blessings that we implore for ourselves. If, therefore, we repeat this prayer, not only with our lips, but also with our heart, we shall not willingly deprive them of the benefits which we ask for them, but, on the contrary, will strive to confer on them these benefits.

3. The *forgiveness of injuries* is recommended to us with an energy which nothing can exceed. The Saviour not only bids us say in the prayer, “and forgive us our trespasses;” but also solemnly adds, immediately after, “For if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Revengeful and implacable

men! is not this declaration sufficient to induce you to pardon and be reconciled to your brother? What more terrible threatening could God make, than that of refusing his forgiveness to you? This threatening he will infallibly execute, if you nourish enmity against your brother. This threatening you daily request him to execute. By your very prayer you brave his vengeance; you supplicate him not to have mercy upon you; you utter the most fatal imprecation against yourselves; you beg him to consign you to everlasting damnation.

4. Since we ask of God our daily bread, let us sincerely acknowledge, and deeply feel, that there is no day, no moment, in which *the hand of God that has formed us, must not support and preserve us*; that in him we live, move, and have our being; that to him all those second causes which benefit us are indebted for their efficacy. Let us moderate our desires for the things of earth; it is *bread* that we ask. Let us, while we diligently employ the means of supplying our wants, which his providence has afforded us, cheerfully rely on his care and goodness, persuaded that he, who giveth the young ravens their food, will not abandon us. Let us not indulge those solitudes and fears for the morrow, which do little credit to our faith and religion.

5. We ask from him the forgiveness of our sins. Unless we appear before his throne like the hypocritical pharisee, we shall present this petition, *feeling our guilt, repenting of our offences*, and resolved to renounce them. We shall present it, rejoicing that there is forgiveness with God, and filled with gratitude for that love which gave the Eternal Son to expiate for our sins. Assured that this is the only asy-

lum of sinners, we shall penitently, and ardently recur to the infinite grace of Him who, having reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, is ready to forgive our sins, when we confess and forsake them.

6. Finally: in concluding our prayers, we testify that *we fear temptations*, when we pray that God would not lead us into them. Let our conduct always show the same holy fear and self-distrust. Let us flee every appearance of evil. Let us avoid every temptation which it is possible to avoid, and never expose ourselves to any, without an absolute necessity. Then we may be assured of the divine support, in those trials to which duty calls us; and we shall pass from triumph to triumph, until we arrive at that world where temptations shall never assail us, and where our supplications shall be changed into thanksgivings and hallelujahs.

## SERMON XLV.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XII.



CLEANSING THE LEPER, AND HEALING THE CENTURION'S SERVANT.

MATTHEW viii. 1—13.

OUR Lord having concluded his sermon, descended from the mount, and on his way to Capernaum was met by a leper, by curing whom he confirmed his doctrine, and displayed his divine power. Of this disgusting and dangerous disorder, which is carefully to be distinguished from the common leprosy, we have an account in the thirteenth chapter of Leviticus, and in the works of the ancient physicians, particularly of Celsus. From time immemorial it has dreadfully prevailed, and still prevails in the greater part of the oriental countries. During the eleventh and twelfth, and following centuries, it so raged in Europe, whither it had been brought from Asia, by the crusaders, that Matthew Paris, who lived at this period, informs us there were then nineteen thousand hospitals entirely occupied by lepers. The most inveterate species of it has always been considered beyond the power of medicine; and neither in the Old nor New Testament do we find a single example of one, who was infected with it, who



was healed, except by miracle. Those afflicted by it were banished from the society of men, and obliged to wear the exterior marks of mourning. "The leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, unclean, unclean. He shall dwell alone. Without the camp shall his habitation be." (Lev. xiii. 45, 46.) Even kings, when attacked by it, were obliged to leave their palace, to abdicate their government, and to abandon society. Of this we have an example, in Azariah, king of Judah. (2 Kings xv. 5.) One of these unhappy persons beheld Jesus approaching to him, and with humility, with faith, and with earnestness, cried out, "*Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*" From the many miraculous cures of which he had heard, he was fully persuaded of our Lord's *ability* to heal him; but he knew not the extent of the Saviour's compassion. He therefore trembled lest he should not be *willing* to bestow so great a blessing upon him; but he implored it with earnestness, and resigned himself to the will of Jesus. Did the miserable ever apply to Christ in vain? Did he ever refuse to listen to the supplications of those who were afflicted in body and in mind; who felt their need of him, and supplicated his compassion? Did he ever fail to reward the exercise of even a feeble and imperfect faith, if it were sincere? He immediately touched the leper, and his disorder vanished. "*Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, and said, I will, be thou clean.*" "I am ever as ready to bestow as thy faith is to request. What thou askest is granted unto thee." The Saviour having thus, in an instant, healed him, bade him go and show himself to the priest, who, by the law of Moses, was to judge of the cleansing of

lepers ; and upon the priest's pronouncing him to be clean, to offer the sacrifices which in such cases were required. This was to be done "*for a testimony unto them ;*" that is, as a legal proof to the Jews of the truth of the miracle, of the divine power of Him who had wrought it, and of his regard to the law of Moses ; and that it might be a witness against them, if after this they rejected him. At the same time Jesus charged him not to divulge the cure till he had complied with the injunctions of the law. "*See thou tell no man.*" He ever wished to avoid ostentation ; and he knew that the priests, from their enmity against him, would probably deny the cure, if they previously knew the manner in which it had been effected, and thus deprive the man of the liberty which he now enjoyed, and the privilege of returning again to his friends, and to society. How difficult must it have been to him to comply with this injunction ! When he felt in his body a consciousness of perfect health, and in his soul an ardent gratitude to his merciful Benefactor, how difficult must it have been to him, to have refrained from publishing the praises of Jesus, and every where declaring his thankfulness !

I have shown you, on a former occasion, the analogy between the cures wrought by our Lord on the bodies, and those which he works on the souls of men. It would perhaps be too much to say that these beneficent miracles were *types* of the spiritual blessings which the Saviour conveys ; but we may confidently affirm, that what he did for the diseased body, is naturally calculated to show us what he will do for the sin-sick soul. Having then considered the *literal* meaning of this passage, let us now consider it as shadowing forth our state and our duty.

The corruption of the human heart is frequently represented in scripture under the figure of sickness, and especially of leprosy. And nothing can more strikingly shadow forth the dreadful state of every child of Adam, who has not applied to the physician of souls, than the unhappy condition of this poor leper before he approached to Jesus. What were the effects which his disorder produced in his body? *pain, weakness, pollution, and a rapid advance to death.* Precisely the same effects, impenitent men, are produced upon your souls, by that guilt and corruption, from which Jesus only can deliver you.

1. The *pains* resulting from the leprosy, especially in an advanced state, are represented as most acute and terrible. But they are joy, they are ecstasy, compared to those sorrows which spring from spiritual sickness, and wring the souls of the ungodly. Should you become real penitents, the anguish of your hearts, the inquietude of your spirits, the quakings of your souls, at the view of your guilt and danger, the shame, the confusion, the humiliation, the self-loathing you will feel for your vileness and ingratitude, will far outweigh all worldly griefs, all corporeal pains. Or if you should continue and die impenitent, you will be still more awfully convinced, that the Almighty God hath inseparably linked together sorrow and sin. In this world you will probably experience, in a greater or less degree, that fear of wrath, that lashing of conscience, that expectation of judgment and fiery indignation, which convulsed the souls of Cain, of Ahab, of Felix, and of so many others. And when you enter upon the eternal world, you will sink down under the wrath of God, under the indignation of the terrible and almighty Jehovah.

Ah! what is the pain of the leper, to the pain of the accursed soul! "Less than nothing, and vanity."

2. The leprosy produced extreme *weakness*, and *indisposedness to the actions and employments of civil life*. And this is another trait of those souls that have not been healed by the heavenly Physician. To be *sinners*, and to be *without strength*, are used by the Apostle as expressions of the same import. Does not the conscience, and the experience of those of you who are yet in your natural state, attest this truth? If at any time you are excited by the reproaches of conscience, alarmed by the fears of futurity, awakened by some loud call of Providence, or touched by an affecting discourse. If from these or similar circumstances, you attempt to perform any holy work, or engage in any sacred duty; you attempt to pray, to repent, to believe, do you find that you have much strength for these employments, and much delight in these occupations? Do you not soon grow weary and fatigued? Yes, my brethren, a corrupted soul is weaker far than the body of the most infirm leper.

3. The *loathsomeness* and *pollution* of the body infected by the leprosy, is far inferior to that of the corrupted soul. Could you, careless men, who have never felt the cleansing efficacy of the blood and Spirit of Jesus, behold your soul as it is regarded by God and all holy intelligences, how speedily, with the leper, would you lay your mouth in the dust, and cry, "Unclean, unclean!"

When the leper was dismissed, Jesus advanced to Capernaum. As he entered the town, a centurion met him, and besought him to cure one of his servants, who was dangerously ill. The Roman legions were divided into companies of a hundred men. The commanders of these companies were termed

centurions. Though the province of Galilee acknowledged Herod Antipas as its tetrarch, yet, since the Romans were the real sovereigns of it, they always kept there a body of troops. The centurion, of whom the text speaks, was a pagan by birth; but probably had become one of those many proselytes, who, without submitting themselves to the discipline and ceremonies of Judaism, adored the one only God, and observed the precepts of the moral law. Had not this been the case, he would not probably have built, as St. Luke informs us he did, a synagogue for the Jews. Few characters more interesting are exhibited to us. Let us combine the accounts of this event given by Matthew and Luke, and we shall find much to admire and to imitate.

1. Behold his *love to his fellow-creatures*. He enters, with the deepest interest, into the concerns of his servant; he administers to him in his sickness with the tenderest affection; he applies to the elders of the Jews to intercede for him with Jesus; he omits nothing that can contribute to his welfare.

2. Behold his *warm and liberal piety towards God*. Though he had learned to acknowledge the only true God, yet he had embraced neither the doctrines nor discipline of the Jewish church. But he was solicitous to promote the worship of God, even though he did not acquiesce in the peculiar mode in which he was worshipped. He therefore built a synagogue at his own expense. What an admirable example of liberality and candour!

3. Behold his *low thoughts of himself*. He arrogates nothing to himself from his rank and authority. He values not himself on his benevolence to man and zeal for God. While the elders of the Jews judged him worthy that a miracle should be wrought for

him, he accounted himself unworthy of the smallest favour. This was the reason that he at first forebore to wait on our Lord in person; but when Jesus drew near to his house, this same humility compelled him to go and meet him, lest he should seem guilty of disrespect. How lovely does such a character appear in the eyes of both God and man!

4. Behold his *exalted thoughts of Christ*. He judged our Lord to be too holy to admit of converse with a heathen. He believed the Saviour's power to be unlimited, so that he could effect what he pleased at a distance, without the intervention of means. He was persuaded that universal nature was subject to the will of Jesus, far more than the most obedient soldier could be to the commands of his officer.

Such a character as this could never meet with a repulse from Jesus. He, therefore, on the request of the elders, immediately advanced to the centurion's house. He who, though repeatedly importuned, refused to visit a nobleman's son, went at the very first summons to attend upon a centurion's servant. He no sooner met the centurion, than he expressed his admiration of his faith. We never read of the Saviour's admiring the things of this world. He always checked such ill-placed veneration; but he here teaches us, by his example, that true faith can never be estimated too highly. He gave joy to the heart of the centurion, by declaring that this faith had not been equalled by the Israelites themselves. Jesus never contents himself with barren approbation; he gives more solid proofs of his love. By a simple act of his will, he restored the servant to perfect health, and told the centurion it should be to him according to his faith. Thus he removed the distress of the family in an instant. Thus, too, he confirmed the faith

which had shone so nobly, and showed that we can never expect too much from him. What advantages for the acquisition of eternal life the centurion derived from this event! With what lively hope might he now apply to Jesus for the saving of his soul! The Scriptures are silent concerning his subsequent life; but we can never suppose that such love and piety, such humility and faith, should perish.

Our Lord concludes with a solemn declaration, that many such persons should be saved, while many, with clearer light and higher privileges, shall be rejected. "But I say unto you, Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God." But the "children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Those who profess the true religion may be called the children of the kingdom; but how many of them are destitute of the attainments which this heathen had made!

## SERMON XLVI.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XIII.



PETER'S WIFE'S MOTHER—EJECTION OF AN EVIL SPIRIT—  
STORM—GERGESENES.

MATTHEW viii. 14, &amp;c.

AFFLICTIONS and diseases enter the families of the servants of God, as well as of the unholy. Though Peter was one of the peculiar favourites of our Lord, and privileged to have more intimate access to him than almost any of the apostles, yet he experienced personally, and in his family, those troubles common to humanity. The aged mother of his wife spent her declining years with him. She had been afflicted by a fever, which, by its duration and violence, had reduced her to a weak and languid state. Her trial was doubtless the greater, because she was detained from attending the public ordinances of God; and this, too, at a time when He, who “spake as never man spake,” had come to Capernaum to instruct the people. Peter interceded for his afflicted relative; and his intercessions were not in vain. “Jesus arose out of the synagogue,” says St. Luke, “and entered into Simon’s house.” He rebuked her disorder. It instantly vanished, and her former strength returned. Universal joy succeeded to the tears of sympathy and compassion, which had before



been paid to the sufferings of this aged female. Rejoicing in her perfect restoration, and desirous of manifesting her gratitude, she immediately ministered to Jesus and his attendants.

Christians, imitate the example of Peter. In the arms of faith and prayer, carry your friends and relations to Jesus. If they are suffering under external afflictions, or if their souls are languishing, spread their wants before him. Your intercessions will probably benefit them, will certainly draw down blessings upon yourselves.

And you who have received mercies from God, learn from the example of this pious matron to testify your gratitude. Have you been preserved in health, or restored from sickness? Content not yourselves with making a few cold acknowledgments; but render active services to your Benefactor. Do not pretend that there is nothing which you can do for him. Whatever your capacity or your situation in life is, you may find something to perform for Jesus; and however mean or trifling the service is, it shall be accepted, if it spring from a grateful heart.

“*When the even was come,*” proceeds the Evangelist, i. e. after the Jewish Sabbath was ended, “*they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils, and he cast out the spirits with his word.*” From this and a variety of other passages in the New Testament, we learn that, just before the advent of our Saviour, Satan was permitted to exercise a power over the bodies of men which he no longer possesses. Perhaps one great reason why Providence permitted this, was to show, visibly and openly, the superiority of Jesus to the adversary of souls; and to dispose men joyfully to receive him who “came to destroy the

works of the devil." These evil spirits inflicted upon all whom they possessed the severest sufferings, and rendered them personally unhappy and formidable to others. Human power was inadequate to the relief of these unhappy persons; but the spirits who afflicted them bowed before the authority, and fled at the command, of Jesus; and the same men who were furious and ungovernable, became calm and composed, threw themselves at the feet of their Benefactor, and poured forth the effusions of praise, and the tears of gratitude.

We have an instance of the ejection of one of these spirits, which occurred about this time, (Luke iv. 33—37.) Whilst Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, a man who was possessed was present. The evil spirit immediately *knew* Jesus. Notwithstanding the lowly habit in which he sojourned among men, he knew him to be the Son of God, who had left the bosom of his Father to assume our nature and dwell among us. He was well aware that this Holy One of Israel must feel an irreconcilable aversion to one of such impious dispositions. He *dreaded* Jesus. He knew that he was the promised Seed who should bruise the head of the serpent. He knew that he was to be the Judge of evil spirits at the last day, when their present miseries should be greatly augmented. He therefore cried out, "Let us alone: what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee, who thou art, the Holy One of God." It was in vain, however, that he pleaded; Jesus would not receive his acknowledgments, but enjoined him silence, and ordered him instantly to depart from the unhappy object who had so long been subjected to his malice and fury. "And Jesus rebuked him, saying

Hold thy peace, and come out of him! And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not."

My brethren, let this incident teach us not to rest in a speculative knowledge of Christ. We see that this evil spirit was well acquainted with the person and offices of Christ; but, notwithstanding his knowledge, he was a devil still. To what purpose will be all our knowledge, if we are not sanctified by it? It will only aggravate our guilt, and enhance our condemnation. We never know Jesus aright, till we love his presence, and delight in an unreserved compliance with his will.

Learn, also, to welcome and improve his presence. He comes to us by the preaching of the gospel. Shall we, by our indifference or aversion, say to him, "Let us alone?" Shall we not rather say, 'Lord, expel this evil spirit from my heart, and take me under thy care and protection?' Then shall the "prince of this world be cast out," and we be brought from his thralldom into "the glorious liberty of the sons of God."

Thus Jesus delivered the possessed. He healed, also, all manner of diseases; and thus proved himself to be indeed the promised "Sun of Righteousness, with healing in his wings." Great multitudes followed him, impelled by different motives. When he retired a little into a desert, the crowd that was collected at Capernaum sought him out, as we are informed by St. Luke, (iv. 42, &c.) and entreated him never to depart from them. He replied, that this was inconsistent with the duties of his mission. "I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for therefore am I sent." He resolved, therefore, to go to the other side of the lake.

A scribe, who was present, offered to accompany him. "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." Jesus, knowing his heart, and perceiving that he was impelled only by a desire of sharing in the pleasures and profits of that temporal kingdom, which the Jews supposed that the Messiah would erect, rejected his service, and pointed out to him his error in supposing that he would better his worldly circumstances. "Jesus said unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Another person who was present, and who had for some time followed Jesus as his disciple, expressed his willingness still to continue his follower, provided he might first attend on his father till his death. "Another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." "*Jesus said unto him, Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.*" That is, let such as are dead in sin, who have neither hope nor desire of immortality, and who are not devoted to me, as you profess to be, perform that office to your father when he dies; for if you wish to become my disciple, you must not neglect my work by waiting for his death, which may not happen so soon as you are imagining.

The disciples having procured a vessel, Jesus entered it, together with them, and sailed towards the country of the Gadarenes. Jesus, fatigued with the labours of the day, fell asleep; while he slept, a furious storm arose. Its violence was such that the disciples expected every moment to perish; full of apprehension, they ran to the Saviour, exclaiming, "Lord, save us, we perish!" They were properly reprov'd by Jesus for their fears. Why should they tremble, when they had put to sea at our Lord's command,

and when he was present with them? But still, notwithstanding their weakness, they showed in whom was their trust, and that they had no hope but in his almighty aid. Jesus immediately interposed for their deliverance. He could, if he had seen fit, have prevented the storm. But his disciples would not then have witnessed this marvellous display of their master's power, nor have hence acquired additional cause of trust in him. It is for the same gracious ends that he permits our troubles, and when they have brought us to him in fervent supplications, he will deliver us from them.

He arose, and, with authority, rebuked the storm. Instantly the boisterous winds were hushed, and the roaring billows silenced. Though at other times the waters after a storm remain in a perturbed state, they then at his command subsided to a perfect calm. Such is the effect which his word produces on the tempest-tossed soul. Terrors that appalled the conscience are dissipated as a cloud; temptations that agitated the frame are disarmed of their power; and afflictions that overwhelmed the soul are made to yield the "peaceable fruits of righteousness." Well might the beholders marvel, and exclaim, "What manner of man is this?" when even the winds and the waves, than which nothing seems more beyond the control of man, heard the voice and obeyed the will of the Lord Jesus.

Learn from this event, trembling believer, that the Lord is never unmindful of the troubles of his people, even though he should appear to neglect them. According to the language which Mark attributes to the disciples, they supposed that Jesus was inattentive to them: "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" Yet his providential care was not the less

exerted because he was asleep. *We*, also, on some occasions, are apt to think him unmindful of us, and disposed to adopt the impatient language of the church of old, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me." The answer he gave to them is equally applicable to us, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." We need never be afraid, if we are embarked with Jesus. His ark may be tossed about, and driven by tempestuous winds, but, though every thing else should perish, *that* shall outlive the storm.

Let us be taught, also, from this miracle, that he is able to save us out of the greatest difficulties, as well as the least. We are prone to limit him in the exercise of his goodness. Nor are even the most signal manifestations of his power sufficient entirely to correct this propensity. But he who created and upholds all things, can overrule them as he pleases. And his promises to his people are fully commensurate with their wants. Let us then go to him with confidence under our most pressing difficulties; and rest assured that he is able and willing to save to the uttermost.

On the ceasing of the storm, Jesus and his disciples landed in the country of the *Gergesenes*, says Matthew; of the *Gadarenes*, say Mark and Luke. It is the same country which bore these two names from the two principal cities, *Gergesa* and *Gadara*. Two persons, possessed with devils, there met the Saviour. Mark and Luke mention but one of them, who was by far the most furious; who had often been bound with chains and fetters, and broken them; and who, no longer restrained, shunned the

society of men, wandered day and night among the solitary caverns out of the city, in which, according to the practice of the Jews, the dead were reposit-ed, making the most frightful outcries, tearing and cutting himself with the stones. This unhappy man and his companion, not only thus injured themselves, but also furiously attacked the persons who passed that way. This did not prevent Jesus from meeting them, for he carries with him chains which the combined powers of hell cannot break; he humbles them, and makes them tremble before him. At beholding him we should have supposed that they would have been filled with fury, or, agitated with fear, would have fled and hid themselves in the caverns of the mountains. A secret power restrains them; they know that in every place they are subject to the control of the Lord. They have, therefore, no resource left, except to endeavour to move him. They, therefore, cast themselves before him, exclaiming, "What have we do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" It is added in Mark, "I adjure thee by God, that thou torment us not."

That the misery of these men should be known before he delivered them, our Lord asked one of the devils his name. He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." At the same time, adds St. Luke, "they besought him that he would not make them go into the *deep*:" in the original, "the *abyss*," the place of punishment. The devils well know that their condemnation is fixed and irrevocable. They know that at the day of judgment their punishment shall be pronounced in the presence of the universe, their miseries increased, and themselves for ever confined in the infernal abyss. They here suppli-

cate Jesus not to hasten this punishment; not to send them instantly to hell. They also entreated permission to enter a herd of swine that were feeding at a little distance. In order to show the reality of the possession, and to show to all ages what is the power of evil spirits, and how terrible their malice would be if it were not restrained, he permitted them: and the herd suddenly ran from the top of the rocks into the sea, and were drowned; whilst the men who had been possessed became calm and serene, and recovered the perfect exercise of their powers. Jesus might also permit the devils to enter the swine as a punishment to their owners, who, if Jews, were guilty of a violation of the law; and if Gentiles, spread a snare to the Jewish people, and expressed contempt for their religion, by keeping them within the confines of Palestine, and in the midst of the Jews. Besides, Jesus, as God, had a sovereign authority over the whole earth. He could give, and he could take away, from whom he pleased, without being accountable to his creatures.

Those who had seen this miracle, fled and recounted it at Gadara. The inhabitants came out in crowds, and with astonishment saw the most furious of the demoniacs sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind. Instead of filling them with admiration and love, this spectacle excites fear in them. Vicious and criminal men tremble at virtue accompanied with power. They therefore solicit him to leave the country. He immediately complied with their request. The dispossessed demoniac could not however think of leaving his benefactor. He wished to live and die with him who had bestowed so inestimable a favour upon him. The Lord however told him, "Go home to thy friends, and tell



how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." He acquiesced in the Lord's will, and lived a conspicuous monument of the power and grace of Christ.

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## SERMON XLVII.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XIV.



CURING OF THE PARALYTIC—CALL OF MATTHEW—VINDICATION OF HIMSELF FOR ASSOCIATING WITH PUBLICANS AND SINNERS.

MATTHEW IX.

OUR Lord having quitted the country of the Gadarenes, whither we attended him in our last discourse, re-crossed the lake, and returned to Galilee. As he principally resided at Capernaum, St. Matthew calls it *his own city*. Happy had it been for its inhabitants, if they had known how to profit by the privileges they enjoyed; but in general they neglected their opportunities, and prepared for themselves the severest condemnation.

Jesus did not constantly remain at Capernaum, but frequently went out from it to the neighbouring towns and cities, to preach the gospel. He however returned thither to rest from his fatigues, and lodged perhaps in the house of Peter, or more probably of

his mother-in-law, since Peter was of Bethsaida, a village at no great distance.

As soon as it was known that Jesus was returned, so great a multitude assembled that the house could not contain them, nor even the court before the door. Among them were many scribes, and “pharisees, and doctors of the law, who,” says St. Luke, “were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and even from Jerusalem.” On this occasion, a man was brought to him who was afflicted with the palsy to such a degree that he could neither stand, walk, nor sit. He was therefore carried by four persons on a portable bed or couch. In consequence of the crowd they could not get access to Jesus through the door. They would not however relax in their exertions to obtain a cure; but went to the roof of the house, and having broken up the tiling, let the man down into the midst of the room in which Jesus was. The houses of the orientals generally are but a single story high. Their roofs are flat, and guarded on every side by a balustrade. There are two ways of access to the top: one from the inside, and the other by steps from the outside. By these the persons who bore the sick man ascended to the roof.

Jesus was not offended at this intrusion, but “seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.” *He saw their faith*; i. e. the firm persuasion which they had that he was endued with miraculous powers, and sent of God; that he had sufficient power to cure this unhappy man, and sufficient benevolence to exercise this power in his behalf. This faith Jesus required of all those who sought favours from him. It was a *necessary* condition: for those who did not believe that he had power to heal them would not

apply to him; or if they did, their requests would be insults. It was a *gracious* condition: nothing was required to secure the greatest blessings except a belief in his ability and goodness. It was a *reasonable* condition: since he had already proved the divinity of his mission by innumerable miracles.

Jesus then saw this faith in the sick man, and in those who carried him. He saw it in their hearts, since the most secret thoughts are not unknown to him; he saw it also in their conduct; "their faith was shown by their works." He saw also the *charity* of these men, who, not being able to pass through the crowd which surrounded the door, would not relinquish their benevolent exertions, but persisted till they had through the roof opened a passage to Jesus. With such strong faith, and such active charity, they need not fear a repulse. When we approach the Lord with these dispositions, he will always address us in the language of mercy.

Brethren, let the conduct of these compassionate men teach us our duty to our friends and relations. Are there none of them who have a palsy of the soul, whose faculties are altogether destitute of spiritual motion and sensation? And shall we coolly suffer them to perish, when there is a physician who can heal them? Ought we not to carry them by faith into the presence of the compassionate Jesus? He will not be offended by our intrusion, and our labours of love may have the most salutary effects. Little do we think how many thousands have been converted in answer to the entreaties of God's praying people. When St. Augustine was still dissipated and thoughtless, Ambrose, bishop of Milan, said to his mother Monica, who was mourning over the irregularities of her child, "Fear not; the son of so many prayers

cannot be lost." The event justified his predictions, since he became one of the most shining lights of the church. It may be so with us; in answer to our prayers, we may see our friends healed of their sins, and triumphing in their blessed Saviour. We are sure, at least, that our prayers shall "return into our own bosom," and draw down blessings for ourselves. Let us then exert ourselves to bring all around us to the presence of Jesus.

We return to the sick man. Jesus says to him, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee." The tender epithet, *son*, by which he is addressed, displays the kindness and mercy of the Son of God, and was calculated to inspire confidence and joy in the bosom of this unhappy man. "*Be of good cheer.*" 'Dismiss your fears and apprehensions; I am not now come as your Judge, but as your deliverer.' "*Your sins are forgiven you.*" These words show that the sickness of this man was derived from some sin which he had committed. Probably his knowledge of this, and his secret self-reproaches, inspired him with a mixture of hope and fear in approaching to Jesus. He is persuaded that the Saviour can heal him; but at the same time he is no less persuaded that he has merited the chastisement he endures, and that Jesus is acquainted with his sin. 'It is true,' he says to himself, 'he is able to cure me, but I am unworthy of his favour.' Jesus, who perceives his inward trouble, begins by tranquillizing his conscience. 'It is comparatively of small consequence to heal your body; you have another disorder more lamentable than your palsy; I see the deep wound of your soul; I love you as my son, and I will heal your soul as well as your body. I announce to you that your sins are forgiven.' I attempt not to de-

scribe to you the joy which swelled the heart of this man at these words of our Saviour. You only can conceive it who know what it is to love God, to offend him, and afterwards to obtain forgiveness through repentance and faith.

My brethren, Jesus is still as able and willing to forgive sin. If he possessed this power when he sojourned on earth, surely he retains it now that he is enthroned in glory. "He is exalted," says the apostle, for this very purpose, "to give repentance and remission of sins." Let us then present ourselves before him with all our miseries and wants. Let us endeavour by all possible means to get access to him. Let us break through every obstacle that would defeat our endeavours. Let us approach him with an assurance of his power and willingness to save; and he will certainly say to us, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee."

On hearing this address of the Saviour, the pharisees and scribes were offended. Though they did not openly find fault, they said within themselves, "Who is this that speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Their principle was just, but the application of it was incorrect. Certainly, none but God has any authority to forgive sin; and the assumption of this power by any mere creature would be blasphemy. But in Jesus "dwelt the fulness of the Godhead." He turns to them, and vindicates his expression. "*Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?*" By thus showing them that he read their most secret thoughts, he proved that he was endued with the omniscient Spirit of God, and therefore could exercise divine powers. He then appeals to them, whether the same authority is not required to remove the effect, as to remove the cause; whe-

ther he who has power to deliver from a disorder which is the punishment of sin, has not power also to forgive that sin. "*Whether is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise and walk?*"

My brethren, many of you have, at times, been dangerously sick. Has the disorder of your soul been healed, as well as that of your body? Have you, like this man, obtained the remission of your sins, as well as restoration to health? You are yet in a miserable state, if you are cured without a pardon; if the soul is still disordered, when the body is made whole. "Bless the Lord, O my soul," said David, "who forgiveth all thine iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases." The latter blessing he esteemed of little consequence, in comparison with the former. When God takes away a disease, and does not take away our guilt, it is not so properly a deliverance, as a respite from present execution.

The pharisees appear to have made no answer to our Lord's address. He, therefore, only further told them, that what he was about to do would demonstrate his power to forgive sins, and, turning to the paralytic, bid him rise, and carry away his bed. "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go to thine own house." Scarcely had the Saviour spoken, before the man was suddenly and entirely healed; and immediately, in the presence of them all, took up his couch and departed. What confusion must have been felt by the scribes and pharisees at this spectacle! We are not told the effect that it produced upon them; probably, however, in this, as in other instances, they were not suitably affected. The clear evidence of truth generally excites, in corrupt

minds, only rage and fury. The pharisees, when they could not deny the miracles of the Saviour, chose rather to attribute them to the aid of devils, and the secrets of magic, than acknowledge his divine mission. Probably those present on this occasion were not more humble and docile than their brethren, and like them resisted the dictates of their own minds. But the people, who were not affected by the prejudices and passions of their teachers, were filled at first with wonder, and then, elevating their hearts to the Source of all blessings, "they glorified God who had given such power to man;" for they still had not a clear view of the character of the Redeemer.

It would be pleasant to us to know what was the future conduct of this man; but on this subject Scripture is silent. This, with many other things not fully revealed in the sacred oracles, we shall probably learn in the heavenly world. Perhaps, Christians, you may hereafter associate with this person, and with many others who were the subjects of the Saviour's beneficent miracles, and find their hearts still glowing with gratitude to their Deliverer, and their mouths overflowing with his praises.

After having healed this paralytic, "Jesus," says St. Mark, "went forth by the seaside, and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them." We know not what was the subject of his discourse at this time. When he had finished speaking, he passed by the "receipt of custom," or place where the collectors of the tax waited to gather or levy it. Here he sees a publican sitting, whom he commanded to follow him. This publican was St. Matthew, a Jew by birth and religion. He is the same person who is called Levi by Mark and Luke. It was a

common thing among the Jews to have two names; and probably this Evangelist quitted the name of Levi to assume that of Matthew, when he became a publican. If this conjecture be true, it assigns to us a reason why he always preserves this name, and speaks of himself by it in his writings. It was to show that he never forgot that the Lord took him from an odious profession, to make of him one of his disciples, and even one of his apostles. It is useful for the children of God thus to preserve the remembrance of the misery and sinfulness of their former state, that their hearts may be filled with humility and inflamed with love. It is thus that St. Paul never forgot that he had been the persecutor of the church. All the services which he renders to it cannot efface from his memory the sufferings he has inflicted on it. He never loses from his view his infinite obligations to Jesus Christ.

St. Matthew was, then, a publican. Than this profession, as we have already remarked, none was more detested by the Jews. Pompey having conquered Judea about sixty years before Christ, the Romans imposed a tribute upon it, to which the inhabitants reluctantly submitted. The persons who collected this tribute were termed *publicans*, and generally were dissolute, immoral, and rapacious. Matthew was one of these officers, and had his house at Capernaum, on the shore of the lake of Gennesareth, to receive the duties on goods that were transported from Galilee to Perea, or from Perea to Galilee. Jesus, passing by, saw him, and said unto him, "*Follow me.*" Matthew did not hesitate a moment; but complied instantly with the call of the Redeemer. He did not act precipitately in thus obeying the voice of Jesus. He had had full and satisfactory proof of



his divine mission. He resided at Capernaum, where Jesus had wrought so many illustrious miracles. His house was on the borders of the lake, on which, but a few days before, the voice of the Redeemer had stilled a furious tempest; on which the winds and the waves had acknowledged him as the Lord of nature, and been calm. He beholds the Saviour now surrounded by a vast multitude, who publish aloud the miraculous cure of the paralytic, which has just taken place. Ought he then to have hesitated when Jesus said to him, "*Follow me?*" Besides, these words were doubtless accompanied by a secret energy, a divine power, which he could not resist. No wonder then, that he immediately abandoned his office, in order to attend constantly upon Jesus, to learn his doctrines, to witness his miracles, and to be prepared for that important ministry to which Christ destined him.

"And Levi," says St. Luke, "made him a great feast at his own house, and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them." Perhaps they came, hoping to be made partakers of that grace which Matthew had received; or, more probably, Matthew had invited them, desirous that their hearts might be touched by the instructions of the Saviour. "What sinner," exclaims the excellent Bishop Hall, "can fear to kneel before thee, blessed Jesus, when he sees publicans and sinners sit with thee? Who can fear to be despised of thy meekness and mercy, when thou didst not abhor to converse with the outcasts of men? Thou didst not despise the thief confessing upon the cross, nor the sinner weeping upon thy feet, nor the Canaanite crying to thee in the way, nor the odious publican, nor the forswearing disciple, nor the persecutor of

disciples, nor thine own executioners ; how can we be unwelcome to thee, if we come with tears in our eyes, and with faith in our hearts. O Saviour, our hearts are too often shut against thee ! thy bosom is ever open to us !”

The pharisees were offended at this condescension of the Saviour, and addressing his disciples, they insolently asked them, in the hearing of the guests, “ *How is it that your master eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners ?*” Jesus, overhearing them, replied, “ *They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick.*” ‘ You do not blame the physician for visiting those whose disorders require his aid. I am the physician of souls, and the object of my ministry is to cure them of their sins, and their errors. Should I not then be with the spiritually sick. They who, like you, have a high opinion of their own righteousness, will not feel their need of me, and there is little hope of benefiting them. But they who, like these publicans, are without this vain conceit of their own excellency, are readily brought to feel that they are sinners, and to prize the physician of souls. Why then, since you acknowledge that they need healing, should you be offended at me for visiting them ?’

My brethren, let this declaration of our Saviour teach us the danger of self-righteousness. There are many who are lost eternally, because confiding on a moral and decent life, they suppose they have little need of Jesus. A man who, in dying circumstances, denies his need of help, as effectually destroys himself, as though he swallowed poison, or plunged a dagger in his heart. Deny not then your need of the heavenly Physician. Think not to heal yourself by any self-righteous methods. If, like the

publican, you would go down to your house justified, you must, like him, cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

Let this declaration teach us to beware of unbelief. We are apt to make the depth of our misery a reason for despondency. But to doubt the heavenly Physician's power, will be as destructive to the soul as to deny our need of him. Whatever be our spiritual infirmity, we may find a remedy in Christ.

To silence these proud censurers, Jesus also refers them to a passage in the prophet Hosea, "Go ye, and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice:" that is, I prefer the exercise of mercy to all the ceremonial worship, and even to sacrifices, which constituted the principal part of it.

The application of this passage is striking. It is as though the Saviour had said, 'Even if the ceremonial law forbade us to visit sinners, yet, still, this law ought to be forgotten when it is an obstacle to their conversion; for, since God prefers works of mercy to sacrifices, and since the most excellent of these works is that of converting and saving sinners, he must prefer their conversion to the observation of a rule which prohibits eating with them. Do not then, unreasonably magnify ceremonial duties, at the expense of charity.'

The Saviour adds, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." The pharisees, proud of their false righteousness and imaginary perfection, believed that heaven was due to their merits. They even dared to carry their pride to the tribunal of their God, and demand of him a merited reward, instead of pardon. This is strikingly represented to us, by our Lord, in the parable of the pharisee and publican, where the first boasts of his

good works, while the other deploras his sins, confesses them, and supplicates pardon for them. Jesus then, who knew the temper of the pharisees, indirectly says to them, 'Of what do you complain? It is not for you that I have come. You suppose yourselves righteous, perfect men. You think you have no need of repentance, and that you have not committed sin. The physician need not go to you, who think you have no maladies to cure. It is to those who feel the weight of their sins and miseries, who sigh after pardon and grace, that I must turn. They feel their need of me, they will welcome me.'

Probably the pharisees felt the force of this remark; but in souls of the character of which theirs was, reproof or admonition excites irritation and anger, instead of leading to a salutary compunction. The history of our Saviour abundantly proves this truth. Publicans and sinners were converted, but the pharisees became more and more wicked. Such is too often the unhappy effects of the vices of the mind. They are not perceived or felt, however great they may be. Full of pride, of ambition, of envy, of cruelty, of malignity, the pharisees still believed themselves saints, because they were not guilty of those gross vices, which we cannot disguise into virtues, nor hide from the world, and which draw down the contempt of society. Their pride rendered them incorrigible; censures, remonstrances, only inflamed them. On the other hand, the vices to which shame is attached, humble the sinner, and prepare him for repentance. Thus the pharisees, who had the vices of the fallen angels, had also their impenitence. Whilst publicans and sinners, who had the vices of corrupted men, repented and reformed.

## SERMON XLVIII.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XV.



VINDICATION OF DISCIPLES FOR NOT FASTING—RAISING  
THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS—ISSUE OF BLOOD HEALED—  
BLIND MEN HEALED—DUMB DEMONIAK CURED—GOING  
INTO A MOUNTAIN TO PRAY—CHOOSING THE APOSTLES.

MAT. ix. 14—17. LUKE viii. 41—56. MAT. ix. 27—  
38. x. 1—4.

IN our last lecture on the life of our Saviour, you heard him calling Matthew from the receipt of custom, and you beheld this publican cheerfully relinquishing the profits of his office, in order to become a follower of Jesus. You saw him, anxious that his brother-publicans should hear the words of grace and mercy, which fell from the lips of the Redeemer, inviting them to a festival, which he honoured with his presence. Your hearts were moved at the tender and conclusive vindication of his conduct, which Jesus presented, when the haughty and cruel pharisees murmured that he associated with such persons: “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Let us now proceed with the history. The pharisees, while they "neglected the weightier matters of the law," while they violated the rules of justice, and were insensible to the claims of mercy, were rigorously austere in their external deportment. In addition to those fasts, which were of divine institution, they received many from tradition, and established some by their own authority. So much did their religion consist in them, that we hear one of them ascribing a high degree of merit to himself for their observance, and arrogantly boasting, even to God, of his scrupulosity in fasting twice every week. (Luke xviii. 12.) And as the life of John the Baptist was austere and abstemious, in correspondance with the nature of his ministry, so his disciples multiplied fasts, in imitation of their master, and of the custom of the pharisees.

These two very different classes of men agreed in inquiring of the Saviour, why he did not impose the same austere discipline upon his disciples which *they* observed. "*Why do the disciples of John, and of the pharisees fast oft; but thy disciples fast not?*" To this question Jesus replied, "*Can the children of the bride-chamber fast while the bridegroom is with them?*" There are seasons and occasions suited to different duties. I am, as John himself has declared concerning me, the spiritual bridegroom, to whom the church is espoused. These, my disciples, are the children of the bride-chamber, the guests of the marriage-feast. It would be unreasonable to require mourning and tears during the festivity of a nuptial feast. It would be equally improper for these, my disciples, to enter upon a course of rigorous abstinence while I am with them, and to fast on these joyful days. But envy them not. They have many afflictions to under-

go, many trials to endure. In a little time I shall leave them, and then they will have occasion for solemn fasting and humiliation. "*But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.*"

To mingle mourning and rejoicing together, adds the Saviour, to fast while they enjoy my immediate presence, would be as incongruous as to put a new piece of cloth into an old garment.

And, finally, he bids them remember, that it is necessary not to discourage the weak, by imposing upon them duties that are too burdensome; that infant virtue must not immediately be put to the greatest trials, lest it should be killed by the severity of the exercise. As new wine would burst the leathern bottles—(for in the east the bottles were anciently made of leather, or goats' skins,)—as new wine would burst the leathern bottles, which by use and age are become too weak to resist the fermentation, and both the wine and the bottles would perish, so will both the precepts which we inculcate, and the persons whom we address, be in danger of perishing, if we neglect to accommodate our directions to the strength of those who receive them. "*Neither do men put new wine into old bottles, else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish. But they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.*"

My brethren, this incident in the life of our Saviour should teach us to *judge others with candour*. We are too apt to make our own experiences and conduct the precise rule for all else, and to condemn them as enthusiasts, if they exceed, or as lukewarm, if they fall short of the standard which we have raised. Even sincere persons may sometimes be found united with the pharisees in reproaching the chil-

dren of God, and condemning them, because their sentiments and conduct do not in every respect accord with their own. But it is not our province, neither are we competent to judge others. The disciples of John might do right in fasting often, and yet the disciples of Jesus not do wrong in forbearing to fast. There are many things belonging to the situations of individuals of which God alone can judge. We must, therefore, leave every man to "stand or fall to his own master," and study to approve ourselves to God.

While Jesus was thus defending his disciples, Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, (probably of Capernaum) came to him, supplicating his aid. His only daughter, who had arrived at the interesting age of twelve years, was apparently at the point of death. Having heard of, and perhaps witnessed some of our Lord's miracles, he earnestly requested him to come and restore her health. Jesus never rejected the petitions of the unhappy. He immediately departed with Jairus, but before they reached the house, the servants brought tidings that the child was dead. "Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master." What a stroke was this to the heart of Jairus! Whilst he hung over the sick bed of his child, while he observed her gradual descent to the tomb, and marked the inefficacy of all human remedies, he had been full of apprehension and sorrow! But when his trouble had driven him to Jesus, when the compassionate Saviour, before whom disease and pain had so often fled, consented to accompany him, doubtless he was inspired with the firmest hope, with the fullest assurance, that his child would be rescued from the tomb, and restored again to his affectionate



bosom. Alas! must he not now abandon these confident, these pleasing expectations? How often has it been thus with thee, believer! Affliction has driven thee to Christ. But, although thou hast applied to him, the storm has still appeared to gather thicker around thee. Difficulties have so increased, that thy hopes have been almost blasted. Thou hast cried for pardon, and found an increased sense of guilt. Thou hast prayed for deliverance from corruption or temptation, and hast experienced the assaults of Satan more violent than ever; thou hast been almost ready to conclude that God has rejected thy prayer, and shut up his tender mercies.

What is to be done in such a situation? Imitate Jairus. Like him, "hope against hope." Like him, regard this accumulated trouble as a renewed exercise and trial of thy faith. It was faith which led this ruler to Christ; and when his case seemed desperate, he did not abandon his hope. It is probable, indeed, that our Lord might perceive some rising apprehension in his mind. But he instantly sustained him with that encouraging address, "Fear not." Arrived at his house, our Lord reproved the excessive lamentation of the mourners; and entering with the parents and three favoured disciples into the chamber of the deceased, he "took her by the hand, and said unto her, *Maid, arise.*" Death listened to the voice of the Lord of life, and dropped the chains with which his prey was bound. The soul, at the command of the God of spirits, re-animated the lifeless body; and the child sprang instantly from the couch of dissolution, and arose in perfect health. Who can describe, who can even conceive, the joy of the happy parents; the fervour with which they poured forth their thanksgivings to God; the

thankfulness to Jesus which swelled their hearts? Christian parents, from whose reluctant bosoms death has torn a darling infant, these raptures are reserved for you. This same Redeemer, who here said, "Maid, arise," shall hereafter, with equal authority and efficacy, say, "Arise, ye dead." Then this beloved, this lamented child, over whose tomb you have wept, shall again fly to your embraces, and you shall exultingly shout, "Our child was dead, but is alive again; was lost, but is found."

The Evangelist relates another miraculous cure, performed by Jesus as he was going to the house of Jairus. A woman, who for twelve years had laboured under a disorder which had baffled all the power of medicine, and who was afflicted with the pains of poverty, as well as the oppression of disease, had heard of the benevolence and power of the Lord, and hoped to find relief from him. Humble and modest, she did not dare to address him; yet, full of faith, she was persuaded that if she could only touch him, she should be healed. She therefore came privately behind him, and touched the hem of his garment, and was instantly cured. Her faith was great, and the honour that was conferred upon her was proportionable to it. Jesus, who by his voluntary influence had restored her to health, turned himself around, publicly commended her faith, confirmed her cure, and dismissed her with the endearing appellation of *daughter*.

Thus will he ever testify his love to all who rely on him; thus will he reward those who place their confidence in him. Let us then make our way to him through all difficulties and obstructions; let us stretch out our hands to him with humble boldness

and confidence : virtue will surely proceed from him to heal our souls.

What a life was that of Jesus ! How unwearied his benevolence, how incessant the exercise of his compassion ! Truly does the apostle say of him, “ He went about doing good.” As we trace his history, one miracle of mercy succeeds to another. Scarcely has he dried the tears and removed the afflictions of one child of misery, before another presents himself, who is also sent away rejoicing. As the sun never pauses in his brilliant career, but continually sends forth beams to enlighten and warm, so our Sun of Righteousness never ceased to shed forth his benign and gracious influences. As he came from the ruler’s house, two blind men followed him, beseeching him to restore them to sight. Unostentatious in the performance of his miracles, and desirous by a delay of his mercy to increase their faith and importunity, he did not notice them in the public street ; but when they had followed him into the house in which he entered, he opened their eyes. Learn, Christians, the benefit of a holy perseverance. If the Lord appear not to hear your first supplications, yet do not desist. For reasons infinitely wise, he often defers for a season the bestowal of his blessings. But wait upon him with patience and faith, and you will in due time receive an answer of peace. Even when he seems to say to you as to the patriarch, “ Let me go,” with him reply, “ I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”

“ *Jesus straitly charged them, saying, Let no man know it.*” But their gratitude was too great, their zeal for the honour of their Benefactor was too warm, to permit them to hold their peace, and “ *they spread abroad*

*his fame in all that country.*" We mean not to excuse them: their duty certainly was to obey the injunction of the Saviour; but their error was the result of a feeling heart, and was allied to gratitude. Believers, "who have been brought from darkness into marvellous light," on whose souls "the day-spring from on high has risen," you have received no such injunction. On the contrary, you are commanded "to show forth the praises of him who hath called you." Do you then, without hesitation, declare the excellences of Jesus; tell others of his compassion, his power, his glories, and strive to allure them to him.

These persons had scarcely departed, when a demoniac, who was dumb, and probably bereft of reason, was brought to him. Insensible of his own misery, and unable to apply for relief, he was brought to the Saviour by others. Happy they who have such charitable and pious friends, who thus pity them when they feel not their need of pity; when they know not their own wretchedness; who thus bear them to Jesus. Our Lord having healed him, he immediately spoke rationally and fluently, to the astonishment of all present; so that they extolled the author of so many miracles above all the prophets that had ever lived. "*They said, It was never so seen in Israel.*" The pharisees, however, were filled with envy and malignant fury; but not being able to deny the reality of the miracles, they ascribed them to magic, and a confederacy with Beelzebub, the prince of devils. The absurdity and impiety of this declaration we shall hereafter be led to examine.

The calumnies of the pharisees could not, however, cause Jesus to desist from his good offices to men; for he immediately after left Capernaum, and made

another tour through Galilee, every where preaching the gospel of salvation, and confirming his doctrine by miraculous cures. In returning to Capernaum he beheld with compassion the vast multitudes who needed instruction, and ordered his disciples to “pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers,” skilful and faithful ministers, “into the harvest.” He himself, also, as we are informed by St. Luke, (vi. 13.) went up privately into a mountain, and spent the whole night in prayer. This was frequently his practice. Again I exclaim, What a life was that of Jesus! Every moment of it was consecrated to works of piety and charity. Can we fail to be moved, when we thus behold him passing his days in conferring the highest blessings upon men; in curing them of their ignorance and vices by his holy and affecting instructions, and of their maladies, by his miraculous power; and after this, spending his wakeful nights in communion with his Father, and in the exercises of devotion? “And when it was day,” continues St. Luke, “he called unto him his disciples; and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.” “He chose them,” says St. Mark, “*to be always with him.*” He did not yet give them the power of working miracles, but kept them nigh his person, to learn the doctrine which they were afterwards to preach; to behold his excellences, and to be witnesses of those miracles by which his divine mission was confirmed. At the expiration of some months he sent them by two and two into the different parts of Judea, to announce the glad tidings of salvation. Hence they were called *apostles*, a word which signifies *persons sent out*. But their name was more peculiarly applicable, and their office carried to its perfection, after the ascension of Christ, when he gave

them the inspiration of the Spirit, and the power of working miracles, and sent them to preach the gospel to every creature.

The names of these highly honoured persons are given us by the Evangelist.

*Simon Peter* and *Andrew* are mentioned first, not because they were superior in dignity to the others, but because they became disciples of Christ before them. They were brethren, the children of Jonah. Originally they were fishermen, and resided at Bethsaida. They afterwards settled at Capernaum, where they dwelt when Christ chose them as apostles. With the disposition, the life, and the circumstances of the death of Peter, you are acquainted. Of Andrew we know less: he has left no writings which may enable us to judge of his spirit and endowments. Having preached some years in Jerusalem, after the ascension of the Saviour, he carried the gospel, according to ecclesiastical historians, to Scythia; and at last was crucified at the city of Patræ in Achaia. Thus these two brethren, who had been united during life in love and obedience to the Saviour, were in death united in conformity to his sufferings.

*James* and *John*, the sons of Zebedee, were also fishermen, and dwelt in Capernaum. They received from Christ the surname of *Boanerges*, that is, sons of thunder; in allusion either to the vehemence of their temper, or to the force and success with which they should preach the gospel. James received the crown of martyrdom under Herod; and John, the beloved disciple, after having survived all the other apostles, died peaceably at Ephesus, at a very advanced age.

*Philip* was also of Bethsaida, and originally was a

disciple of the Baptist. Having preached the gospel in Upper Asia, he died a martyr at Hierapolis.

*Bartholomew* is supposed to be the same with *Nathaniel*, whose conversion we have already considered. The history of *Matthew* has been exhibited to you. Of *Thomas* we know nothing before his conversion: he was also called *Didymus*, probably because he was a twin. *James the less*, (so called to distinguish him from the *James* who was killed by Herod.) *Judas*, who was also called *Lebbeus* and *Thaddeus*. And *Simon Zelotes*, as he is called by *Luke*, or as he is termed by *Matthew*, *Simon the Canaanite*, (which is a Hebrew surname, denoting his zeal and fervour.) These three were brethren, the sons of *Alpheus* or *Cleophas*, and of *Mary*, the sister of the Holy Virgin. They are sometimes called in the gospels, *Christ's brethren*, an expression which the Jews used to signify any near relation. The epistles of *James* and *Jude* were written by the first two of these brethren. The list closes with the name of *Judas* the traitor. He was the son of one *Simon*, and received the surname of *Iscaiot*; the literal meaning of which word is, *a man of Cariot*, a town of the tribe of *Judah*, in which probably he was born.

Such were the persons chosen to establish the Church of Christ, to reform the world, and to overturn idolatry, superstition, and false religion. Had human prudence been to make choice of instruments for so grand an undertaking, doubtless such as were remarkable for deep science, strong reasoning, and prevailing eloquence, would have been selected; and these endowments, probably, would have been supported by the external advantages of wealth and

power. But the wisdom, infinitely superior to that of man, acted differently. The treasure was committed to earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might be seen to be of God.

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## SERMON XLIX.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XVI.



RESTORATION TO LIFE OF THE WIDOW OF NAIN'S SON.

LUKE vii. 11—17.

SOON after the apostles had received their commission and instructions, Jesus went to Nain, a city of the tribe of Issachar, about two miles from Mount Tabor. In this visit he was accompanied by a crowd of disciples, and of other persons, who were collected through various motives. The Jews were always accustomed to bury their dead without the precincts of the city. As Jesus entered Nain, he met a funeral procession, the principal mourner in which engaged his attention and sympathy. She was a *mother*, following her *son* to the grave. Parents, from whose reluctant bosoms those children, whom you loved as yourselves, have been torn, judge of her grief! It was a *son arrived at mature age*. He had safely passed through the dangers of infancy, of



childhood, and of youth; there appeared a long interval between him and old age; and the mother, no doubt, now that he was about to engage in the scenes of active life, blessed God for his providential care of her child, trusted he would safely pass over this interval, and expected to reap the rich harvest of her anxieties, her cares, and her labours, in the duty, the affection, the virtues, and the reputation of her dear son. Alas! instead of realizing these fond anticipations, she beholds this son struggling with death, she sees him straining his closing eye upon her, she hears his expiring groan. Who can tell her agonies? Judge of them by those which David felt, when he poured forth his lamentations, and cried, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Could not, however, this poor mother find consolation from the caresses of her other children, from the recollection of their attachment, from the view of their virtues, and from the hopes that she entertained respecting them? This was *an only son*. In him all her maternal love was concentrated; in him all her hopes and joys must live or die. There is no other child, towards whom the current of her affections may be turned; no other pillar to support her blasted hopes. Still, may she not mingle her tears with those of her husband; may not the afflicted parents, by uniting, mitigate their sorrows? She is a *widow*. She already has wept over the tomb of her husband. The wounds of her soul that were inflicted by his separation, are re-opened, as she goes to unite with his ashes those of his son; as she follows to the same grave the only pledge of their love.

Such was the affecting situation of this mourner. She supposed that the rest of her life would be spent in misery and tears, and that she was about to entomb with her son every prospect of earthly bliss. Ah, Christians! how often, when we are ready to sink in despair, does the God of mercy appear to sustain us! How often, when we see the inefficacy of all human comforters, does his own hand wipe away our tears! Mourn not, bereaved mother, as "those without hope." The compassionate Saviour beholds thee; he pities and will relieve thee. Jesus generally performed his miraculous cures at the request of others. You have seen intercession made for the daughter of Jairus, by her father; for the centurion's servant, by his friends; for the paralytic, by his neighbours. But who supplicates the Redeemer in behalf of this widow? Her afflictions. She is silent; but the sorrows of her heart plead with prevailing eloquence. "*He had compassion on her;*" and his compassion, unlike to that of mortals, is never confined to impotent wishes, to ineffectual condolences. "*He said unto her, Weep not.*" How vain would have been such an address from any other person! From him it was a cordial to her fainting spirit, and an assurance that he would convert her mourning into joy. He stopped the procession, and touched the bier, on which (according to the custom of the Jews at that time) the body was laid on a small bed, covered with a winding-sheet. With that authority which belonged to him as the Lord of life and death, having power to quicken whom he will, he said, "*Young man, arise.*" In an instant, his soul re-animated his body, and he was restored to life and health. How beautifully do the most attractive benignity and the most engaging tenderness mingle with the Saviour's acts

of almighty power! After this display of his omnipotence, he immediately, instead of showing him to the multitude around, to excite their applauses, with the sympathizing kindness of a friend, "took him, and," with his own hands, "delivered him to his mother."

What a flood of powerful emotions rushed upon her heart! How was she agitated with wonder, gratitude, and joy! *Nature* impelled the re-united relatives to fly to each other's arms, and indulge in mutual endearments. *Grace* and *thankfulness* urged them first to prostrate themselves at the feet of Jesus, to bless and adore their Benefactor. Perhaps, fixed in silent astonishment, they remained looking alternately at each other, and at the meekly-majestic Saviour. Here the Scripture is silent. We are told, however, what was the effect produced upon the spectator. "*There came a fear on all.*" That reverential awe, which is produced by any signal manifestation of the divine presence, pervaded the whole multitude; and "*they glorified God*" for this "great prophet," and for again "visiting his people," after suspending all miraculous interpositions for more than eight hundred years.

This history is full of the most valuable instructions.

1. It teaches us the *superiority of Christ over the greatest ancient prophets*. Elijah also raised to life the son of a widow; but how differently did he act from Jesus! In her anguish she complains to the prophet, that he appears to have come into her house only to slay her child. Elijah, touched with this expostulation, and with her complaint, took the child into his chamber, stretched himself three times over it, supplicated God to restore it, and obtained its restoration in answer to prayer. Elisha, in raising the

son of the Shunamite, acted in nearly the same manner. Neither of these prophets spoke to the dead, and authoritatively commanded him to rise. This is peculiar to the Lord; and it evidently shows, that he has an authority infinitely superior to that of the greatest prophets. He acts as the only Son of God; the prophets, as his servants.

2. This history presents us with a striking example of the *compassion of Jesus*. What numberless displays of this virtue do we behold in him, as we advance in his life! In his person, how beautifully is the tenderness of humanity combined with the power of heaven! We constantly behold him, who is to be our Judge, invested with all the amiable sensibilities of our nature. Compassion was the characteristic virtue of his life. It brought him down from heaven; it caused him constantly to "go about doing good." He indulged his feelings from no narrow views; he looked not round for spectators to admire him; he performed not a friendly office, in hopes of a greater in return. No: he chose the helpless and the distressed as the objects of his favour. Misery was not to him a motive of neglect, but a recommendation. It never appeared before him without moving him. If we follow him among those who have lost their friends, we behold his heart always filled with compassion; we always see him mingling tear with tear. If we attend him into scenes of want, we perceive him exerting his divine power in its behalf; if into the habitation of misery, we hear him pouring consolation into the bosom of the afflicted. Who is not moved at the contemplation of such a character? Who does not desire such a friend? Who that calls himself a Christian, does not feel impelled to imitate this illustrious pattern?

3. From the example of this young man, learn the *uncertainty of life*; learn the necessity of being prepared, even in youth, for a close of our days. We all know that we must enter into the tomb. The tempter would in vain say to us, as to our first parents, “*Ye shall not die* ;” we should not believe him. But he says to us, ‘ You shall not die so soon ;’ and almost every one listens to him. Almost every one supposes that his life will be long, and places a wide interval between the present moment and death, which will close his eyes upon the earth. This imaginary interval weakens the impression of death, and makes us careless of preparing to render it happy. Be instructed by the example in the text, and by that of the countless young men whom you have known, who have been cut off in the flower of their days, in the midst of their expectations and their hopes of reaching an advanced old age. Hear, mortals ! hear, dust and ashes, the words of your Lord ! words which are verified by every day’s experience : “ Be ye also ready ; for ye know not *the hour* in which the Son of man shall come.” This is not all ; you know not *the place*, nor the manner in which the Son of man shall come. Let every one, then, say to himself, ‘ I shall die ; the sentence of death is irrevocable ; but when shall it be executed ? Will it be when old age has bent my body to the ground ? Will it be in the midst of my course ? Will it be in this year that I shall be laid in the tomb ? Will it be in a month, in a week, in a day ? God of my life ! thou alone knowest. I shall die ; but *how*, or *where* ? Who can calculate all the avenues to death ? Who can tell which of the arrows of the king of terrors shall pierce my heart ? Every where death takes his stand ; he approaches us in a thousand different

forms, and every where our last hour may sound.' These solemn considerations (and not the less solemn because they are common) should surely incite us to vigilance, should surely lead us to prepare for eternity. You, who have so many years neglected the calls of God; you, who are occupied only with the festivities and employments of earth; you, who are still impenitent, may, perhaps, to-morrow lie cold in the grave. And will you be careless and indifferent in such a situation? Will you waste your time, and neglect your duties, and forget all serious things, when to-morrow you may appear at the bar of God?

4. Let this history teach us *not to love with too much ardour the things of this life*. If you have family and personal mercies, be thankful to God for them, and enjoy them. Let your heart be filled with gratitude while you remember, that the continuance of them is no less a favour than the restoration of them would be. But yet fix not your affections inordinately upon any created good; we know not how soon our dearest comforts may become the occasion of our deepest sorrows. Suffer not your hearts to have an earthly idol, or you prepare for yourselves the keenest woes. Testify to the truth of this, you who, like the widow of Nain, have been bereft of your offspring; ye afflicted Rachels, "who are mourning for your children, and refusing to be comforted, because they are not." How many dear, but illusive expectations did you form concerning these children! In how many dreams of the heart did you indulge! With what confidence did you look forward to the period when you should see them beloved, respected, honoured by their fellow-men! How did it mitigate the bitterness of apprehended death to believe

that they would be nigh you, to smooth your dying pillow; to close your eyes, and receive your last sigh. Have these hopes been all blasted? They are a true image of all other earthly hopes. Have all your expectations of felicity from them been frustrated? so will all other expectations which are founded on the world. Raise then your thoughts above it, and place your affections on those things which can never be taken from you.

5. This history reminds us of that affecting but salutary truth, that *the most dear and intimate relations which we form must be dissolved by death*; and incites relatives and friends so to live that the survivors may not at that solemn moment be overborne with sorrow. Yes, the time is certainly coming, when in anguish you shall see all your mutual affection, all your pleasant intercourse, ending in ghastly looks and in dying pangs; when one of you shall with grief mark the convulsive struggles of the other; when his hand shall give you the pressure of affection for the last time; when his final groan shall vibrate on your ear. Oh! in such a situation what comfort has the survivor except in the hope that the departed friend is happy; and if he cannot scripturally and rationally entertain this hope, what can exceed his misery! Oh! what a sword pierces through the souls of those who weep for wicked, though near relatives and friends; and who, in looking towards the future, see nothing but what is dark, dismal, and afflictive. Will you, who are careless and irreligious, continue to give this terror to your friends? When you are sick, they tremble and are in pain; they fear for two lives at once, that of the body, and the infinitely more important life of the soul. If you die in such a situation, they refuse to be comforted; they esteem

themselves undone, because you have plunged into eternal despair. On the contrary, if they are assured of your pardon and acceptance with God, through Christ, the bitterness of their affliction is removed. If you are sick, they can with comfort go to Christ, saying, in the language of the sisters of Lazarus, "Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick." If in bidding them farewell, you can say as Christ did to his disciples, "I go, but it is to come again," what a consolation will be left to them! Since, then, like this widow and her son, we must be separated from each other, and since there must be so great a difference in the friends who survive us, according as we die impenitent or the children of God, let me exhort you, relatives and friends, to live together as heirs of eternal life, uniting your prayers, and giving mutual examples of piety, that so you may fit each other for heaven, and leave a testimony in each other's bosom of your preparation for eternity. Then, whoever of you die first, the parent or the child, the husband or the wife, the brother or the sister, the survivor in imagination can trace you to heaven, and safely lodge you in the embraces of the Saviour. When they have laid your body in the grave, they will be solaced by the sweet hope that your soul is with the redeemed of the Lord, and is waiting to hail them on their deliverance from earth.

6. This history shows us *whither we should flee in a season of great affliction*. As no physician could restore the widow's son, so none could heal her wounded spirit. But there was one at hand, of whom she little thought, who was able to do both. The same Almighty Deliverer is ever nigh unto us, and calls us to himself when we are bowed down with trouble. Do you say, weeping parent, 'Oh, that he had been



near when the darlings of our hearts were snatched away from us, and we left them in the dust! He was near; for he holds the keys of death; by his appointment they were taken from you. He will say unto them at the last day, "Arise," and if they sleep in him, and you devote yourself to him, there shall be a re-union far more rapturous than that between this mother and her son.

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## SERMON L.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XVII.

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MESSAGE OF JOHN—COMMENDATION OF HIM—REPROOF OF PHARISEES, CHORAZIN, &C.—THANKS FOR REVELATION OF THE GOSPEL TO BABES—INVITATION TO WEARY AND HEAVY LADEN.

MATTHEW xi. 2, &C.

JOHN the Baptist had now for a long time been confined in prison, in consequence of the boldness and freedom with which he had reprov'd the vices of Herod. His disciples, however, had access to him, and related to him the election of the twelve apostles, and the numerous miracles wrought by Jesus. On hearing this intelligence, he sent two of his disciples to the Redeemer to ask him, "*Art thou he who should come,*" the promised and long-ex-

pected Messiah, "*or do we look for another?*" Perhaps the Baptist, who, though a great and illustrious man, was not divested of the frailties of humanity, had become impatient that Jesus, who had wrought so many miracles for others, had wrought none for him; and had chosen twelve illiterate fishermen to preach the gospel while he was suffered to lie idle and useless in prison. If these were his feelings, the message which he sends is to be considered as an expostulation and complaint, rather than an expression of doubt. He knew that Jesus was the Messiah, but he was filled with wonder that Messiah did not rescue his forerunner. Perhaps, however, it is more probable that this message was sent more for the satisfaction of his disciples than of himself. These disciples, on several occasions, shewed a jealousy of the followers of Jesus, and appeared hurt that the glory of their master was obscured by the superior splendour of the Redeemer. Perhaps they may have expressed these sentiments on the present occasion, and from an undue attachment to John, entertained doubts whether Jesus was indeed the Messiah. If so, it was from an anxious and pious solicitude to remove these scruples from their minds, that John sent them to converse with Jesus himself.

Upon their asking the questions, Jesus wrought a variety of miracles in their presence, and bade them return and tell John what things they had seen; particularly that "the blind saw, the lame walked, the deaf heard, the dead were raised, and the poor had the gospel preached to them." These were foretold by the prophets as the marks of the Messiah, and the view of them was a far more convincing answer to their question than any express declaration could have been. The Saviour adds, "*Blessed is he who-*

*soever shall not be offended in me;* "shall not be ashamed of my doctrine, nor discouraged by any temporal evils from embracing it."

Lest the people who heard John's message should be offended at him, because of it, Jesus, so soon as the messengers had departed, spoke to the multitude concerning him. "*What went ye out into the wilderness to see?*" When John preached in the desert many of you crowded to hear him, and were baptized by him. Why did you go to him? What did you expect to behold? Did you think to see "*a reed shaken by the wind?*" a man of an unstable disposition, of wavering doctrine, and a cowardly behaviour? Such was not John, whose constancy remained unshaken, whose testimony was uniform, whose courage was invincible. Did ye go out to see "*a man in soft raiment? Behold they which wear soft raiment are in king's houses.*" The life of the Baptist was austere and mortified; he resembled not those who throng the courts of earthly princes. Did ye then go out to see "*a prophet?*" This was your intention, and ye saw indeed "*more than a prophet:*" one greater than all those prophets who have preceded him. Several considerations show this superiority. He was the harbinger of Messiah; was prophesied of in this character, and had long been expected by the people of God, under the name of Elias, as he was called by Malachi, because he was to possess the spirit and power of Elias. "*This is he of whom it is written,*" "*Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*" "*If ye will receive it, this is that Elias which was to come.*" It was also John the Baptist who first declared openly the advent of Messiah; "*all the prophets and the law prophesied till John*" spoke of the blessings of the Redeemer's kingdom as

things future, while he pointed them out as present. From his time the gospel began to be declared, and through his preaching many were excited to seek salvation with the utmost vehemence and earnestness; even the greatest sinners were induced to press with eager desire after the blessings of the gospel, and to lay hold of them, as it were, by force. “*From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent [βιασαι] take it by force.*” The forerunner was also distinguished by the wonders attending his birth; by a clearer knowledge of the gospel mysteries than the ancient prophets enjoyed; and by his illustrious testimony to the Messiah. For these, and similar reasons, Jesus declares, “*Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: Nevertheless,*” he adds, “*he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*” ‘The meanest person belonging to that kingdom of grace and glory, which I have come to establish, is, in various respects, superior to John; he receives superior supplies of the Spirit, and knows many important truths relative to the gospel of which the forerunner was ignorant.’

Such was the eulogium given to the baptist by the Saviour; by him who could unerringly judge of the true character of men, and whose approbation secures eternal felicity. Let Herod then rage, let the executioner approach, let death advance to John, he is still happy, since he is commended by Jesus.

Jesus, commending John while he was in prison, teaches us that we must not judge of his affection for us, by the external blessings of his providence. Frequently he confers earthly pleasures, riches, enjoyments, on those whom he will at last sentence to

perdition; and suffers those whom he loves to be assailed with distress, to languish in poverty and confinement. But an assurance of his love can divest affliction of its sting, and convert a prison into a paradise.

Are the privileges of those who live in gospel times so great? Do our ears hear the sound of salvation? Do we even enjoy a degree of light superior to that of John? Let us improve these advantages, or they will prove a curse to us. Let us walk as children of the light, or we shall hereafter wish we had been left in pagan darkness.

The Saviour proceeds to reprove the perverseness of the Jews, and especially of the pharisees. In Judea (as you see in many parts of the Scriptures) it was customary at feasts, to have cheerful music, accompanied with dancing; and at funerals, melancholy airs, to which were joined the lamentations of persons hired for that purpose. The children in that country imitating these things in their diversions, it often happened that while one band performed the musical part, the other, being froward, would not answer them by dancing, or lamenting. This naturally gave occasion to the complaint, which at last became a proverbial mode of speech; "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented." This proverb our Lord applies to the pharisees, to show that the divine wisdom had in vain employed every means for their conversion. The mourning airs naturally represent the severe austerity of the Baptist's manners, the stern dignity of his character, and the disagreeableness of the doctrine of repentance, which he preached. But instead of being led by these circumstances to reverence him, they as-

serted that his severities were the effects of diabolic possession of madness, or religious melancholy. On the other hand, the cheerful airs in the proverb beautifully represent our Lord's benevolent disposition, affable conversation, engaging condescension, and familiar manner of instructing all. But instead of being attracted by so lovely a character, they load him with reproach, and esteem him a fit companion for the worst of men. But whatever their malice and envy can suggest, those who are truly wise and religious, approve and admire this beautiful variety in the dispensations of providence, and in the mode of announcing divine truths. *“Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets and calling unto their fellows, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced: we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came, neither eating nor drinking; and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking; and they say, Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber; a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.”*

My brethren, how many of you are there who imitate this conduct of the Jews; who disregard and neglect the truth of God; who, though professing to believe in Christ, and approve his religion, are not suitably affected by it; who rejoice not in its promises; who are not humbled by its threatenings? Seek not excuses for this neglect of the doctrines and duties of religion, but acknowledge that it proceeds from the perverseness and obstinacy of your heart. We, at this distance of time, perceive plainly that this was the case with the Jews, in their treatment of Christ and his apostles. But we are not aware that the same principle operates in ourselves, while

we disregard the gospel. This gospel proposes humiliating doctrines, which we are too proud to receive; and self-denying rules of conduct, which we cannot endure to follow. This was the real cause of its rejection by the Jews, and it is the real cause of its rejection by so many of us. They quieted their conscience by assigning other motives for their neglect; imitate not their example, lest you share their destiny; show yourselves the children of wisdom, by embracing and improving the divine instructions.

Having thus reproved the neglectors of the gospel in general, Jesus proceeded to denounce heavy judgments against those cities which he had particularly blessed with his presence; in which he had delivered many excellent discourses, and wrought the most stupendous miracles. He denounces against them woes more awful than those with which God visited Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, cities infamous for their impiety, pride, luxury, and debauchery. "*Wo unto thee, Chorazin; wo unto thee, Bethsaida: for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, in the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for you.*"

How deep is the guilt! how awful will be the condemnation of those who enjoy the means of grace, the ordinances of God's worship, the light of the gospel, and yet despise them! The word of God returneth not empty; it produces always some effect; it

ripens our graces or our sins. If it prove not “a savour of life unto life,” it becomes “a savour of death unto death.” Every means of grace that you have ever enjoyed, every sermon that you have heard, every opportunity of spiritual improvement with which you have been blessed, are recorded in the book of God’s remembrance, and will be produced to you at the judgment day. If they have not inspired you with holy principles, if you, imitating the conduct, must share the doom of these cities. With what anguish will you look back upon neglected sabbaths and wasted opportunities. Brethren, there is thunder and lightning in the word of God; if the one do not break the heart, the other will blast it.

Jesus, having thus reproved the impenitence of these cities, blessed God that although the gospel was rejected by many who were esteemed for wisdom and prudence, such as the scribes and pharisees, yet it was cordially embraced by those who were humble, modest, meek, and docile; for this is the sense that is very frequently annexed to the term *babes* in scripture. “*I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.*” Had it been otherwise; had the great, the learned, and the wise, at first received the gospel, it would have been said, and with some plausibility, that it owed its reception among the nations to their influence. But when such weak instruments established the religion of Jesus, in every part of the habitable world, against the combined wisdom, power, and malice of devils and men, we cannot rationally avoid acknowledging that it was supported by the arm of the Almighty.



My brethren, though the great body of those most venerable for their wisdom and science, have been warmly attached to Christianity, and have joyfully laid all their honours at the foot of the cross, yet there are still to be found some of the wise and prudent of the world to whom "the gospel is hidden." Let us pity them, and pray for them. When they boast of their reason, let us say to them, in the words of one of our sacred poets :

"Wrong not the Christian ; think not reason yours :  
 'Tis reason our great Master holds so dear ;  
 'Tis reason's injur'd rights his wrath resents ;  
 'Tis reason's voice obey'd, his glories crown ;  
 To give lost reason life, he pour'd his own.  
 Believe, and show the wisdom of a man—  
 Believe, and taste the pleasure of a God—  
 Believe, and look with triumph on the tomb—  
 Thro' reason's wounds alone thy faith can die."

Lest the example of these unbelievers should influence the multitude, Jesus says to them, "*All things are delivered unto me of my Father.*" He hath committed to my care every thing relating to the salvation of the world: "*And no one knoweth the Son but the Father :*" He alone knoweth the dignity of the Son, what he hath done, and what he will do for the salvation of the world: "*Neither knoweth any one the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.*" I alone perfectly know his nature and perfections, and it is my great business on earth to reveal them to the unhappy children of men. Warmed with the sincerest love to our race, he then exclaims, "*Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!*" Listen to this voice of grace, you that are bowed down with either temporal or spiritual afflictions. If you are drinking of the

cup of sorrow, or groaning under the sense of sin, he invites you to him. Go to him in *faith*, believing him able and willing to relieve you. Go to him with *hope*, let your expectations be large and comprehensive: ye are not straitened in him, be not straitened in yourselves. Go to him with *love*; approach not like those driven by necessity, but let his love attract you, and his excellence warm your heart. Be not discouraged by a sense of your unworthiness; he offers his blessings freely, “without money and without price.”

He promises you *rest*; and were his promises ever falsified, did his faithfulness ever fail? If your troubles are of a temporal nature, the anguish of your spirits shall be soothed, your tears shall be dried, or changed into tears of joy. If your sorrows are spiritual, you shall find in the sufficiency of his blood, and in the efficacy of his grace, a firm and stable foundation of pardon and peace, of holiness and glory.

Jesus adds, “*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls.*” ‘Put yourselves under my instruction. I will impose nothing upon you but what I myself practise. You will not find me an austere instructor. You will find me gentle and condescending, ready to condescend to your ignorance, and to encourage your feeblest efforts. You shall, by learning of me, obtain for your souls rest from the uncertainty of conjecture, from the accusations of conscience, from the turbulence of passion, from the fear of death. “*My yoke is easy and my burden light.*” I impose no unnecessary restraints, my service is perfect freedom, and my commands are not grievous. If in them you find some difficulty, such assistances

and encouragements shall be given you, as will enable you with ease to surmount it.'

Blessed Jesus! may we all listen to this gracious invitation, and experience the fulfilment of this promise in the sacred calm and tranquillity of soul, which thou givest thy followers on earth, and in the unclouded and undisturbed serenity of heaven.

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## SERMON LI.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XVIII.



POOL OF BETHESDA.

JOHN v. 1—9. 13, 14.

You recollect, my brethren, that we lately commenced the history of our blessed Saviour. We together contemplated the "glory that he had with the Father before the foundation of the world:" we considered the nature of that incarnation on which all our hopes are founded: we visited the manger of Bethlehem, and were affected by the song of the angels, the rapture of the shepherds, and the adoration of the magi: we followed the holy family into Egypt, and on their return contemplated the touching example of the youth that dwelt in Naza-

reth: we saw the Redeemer, at the age of twelve, mingling with delight in the services of the temple, and reluctantly abandoning the consecrated hill of Zion: we saw him installed into his ministry, while the Holy Spirit descended upon him from the opening heavens, and the testimony of God to him resounded along the shores of Jordan: we attended him to the desert, and saw Satan baffled and confounded by him: we traced his footsteps, and listened to his instructions during the first year of his ministry, and beheld in him a character uniformly bright and glorious; admirable for its perfect combination of every virtue, attractive for its overflowing benignity and love.

We this day resume this series of lectures. Many who were with us when we first commenced them, have already stood at the bar of God. Many others will probably enter upon their eternal state before their termination. Perhaps death may interrupt the voice of him who addresses you, or close the ears of you who listen to me. Let this solemn consideration make us attentive; and do thou grant, blessed Jesus, that by meditating on thy life, we may be induced to imitate thine holy example. May we believe thy declarations, rely on thy promises, and be interested in thy love; so that when we leave this world, we may see thee as thou art, and dwell for ever with thee.

Jesus had come up to Jerusalem, to celebrate the second passover that occurred during his ministry.\* Whilst there, he went to a pool, or bath, which was remarkable for its miraculous cures, and which was called *Bethesda*,† that is, the *house of mercy*. It was

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\* *Macknight in loc.* shows that *εσθιν* here signifies the *passover*, and not, as some have imagined, the *feast of pentecost*.

\* בית חסד.

surrounded by five porches, or covered walks, in which lay a multitude of persons afflicted with various disorders. For some time past it had been found, that at particular seasons the waters were sensibly troubled. This effect was produced (we are informed by the Evangelist,) through the agency of an angel sent for that purpose. At these seasons a healing virtue was given to the waters, which extended however only to the first person who entered them, and it removed his disorder, however inveterate or incurable by natural means. This miraculous virtue had probably been given to the pool some years before the advent of the Redeemer, in order to excite an expectation among the Jews that God was about to return to them with *visible* tokens of his favour, such as they had formerly experienced, but which for several centuries had been withdrawn; and also in honour of the personal appearance of the Son of God upon earth. I do not enter into those critical discussions concerning this pool which have occupied many commentators. We have subjects of greater importance that claim our regard.\*

As Jesus passed by Bethesda, his attention and his sympathy were attracted by an unhappy paralytic, who for thirty-eight years had been deprived of the use of his limbs, and who for a long time had lain in one of the porches, waiting for the angel to trouble the water; but who always had seen others, less infirm or better attended than himself, entering into it before him on such occasions. Still, however, he persevered in his attendance, hoping that at last the favourable moment would arrive when he should

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\* See on these subjects, *Newcome's Obs.* p. 70. *Beausobre and L'Enfant's Pref. Gen.* pp. 50, 51, 52. *Formey's Phil. Chr.* Vol. iv. Dis. 13.

be restored to health. The Saviour knew all the extent of this poor man's misery; for his own information it was not necessary to interrogate him: but that the miracle might be more conspicuous, and that the people around might be made acquainted with the sad state of the paralytic, Jesus, approaching him, inquires whether he is desirous of recovering his health. "*He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?*"

The man being unacquainted with Jesus, did not comprehend the full import and extent of the question. He supposed that the Saviour was some charitable Israelite, who was willing to carry him to the pool at the proper season. Instead therefore of directly answering the question, he complains of the little charity which he found among his fellow-citizens, and of the cruelty which left him unfriended and abandoned. Jesus immediately declared to him that his disorder was removed; and commanded him, in order to show the perfection of his cure, to take up the bed on which he had lain, and carry it away. Almighty power accompanied the words of the Redeemer: and he who but a moment before could not get into the pool for want of help, instantly restored to health and vigour, carried away his bed in the presence of the multitude.

My brethren, I have several times remarked to you in the course of these lectures, that there is a striking analogy between the miracles of our Lord and the spiritual blessings which he communicates; so that when we see what he did to the bodies of men, we may naturally be led to consider what he will do for our souls.

We, it is true, are not labouring under those corporeal infirmities which embittered the life of this unhappy paralytic; but have we not spiritual diseases

which are equally, which are infinitely more deplorable? Bodily disorders can only impair our constitution, inflict upon us transient pains, or at most hasten for a few years the dissolution of that frame which naturally tends to the dust whence it was taken. But sin and guilt cause evils unspeakably more dreadful: they attack the soul, our noblest part; they rob us of that spiritual health which consists in peace and communion with God; they fill us with terror, with remorse, and fear; they subject the criminal to that eternal death which is the wages of sin. Ah! what are the acutest pains that can rack our frame, what is the dissolution of the soul and body, compared to these infinite woes! Whilst then you are so careful of the health of your bodies, will you remain indifferent to that of your souls? Imagine with what joy and gratitude you would listen to the voice of Jesus offering you a perfect cure, if you were in the same condition with this poor paralytic. And can you then continue insensible and careless, while he offers to deliver you from evils so much greater? Yes, he offers you this deliverance: he cries to you, "*Will ye be made whole?*" Are you heartily desirous of spiritual health? I know that you are apt to quiet your consciences by supposing that you are willing to be saved on the plan of the gospel, if Christ were willing to save you. This is not the case. He has long been wooing you to accept of him, and salvation through him; and has declared and proved his readiness to receive and heal you. God is willing, and the Redeemer is willing, to bless you and cure your spiritual disorders. Your own consent, to be healed in the way of his appointment, alone is wanting to enable you to recover spiritual health.

“ *Will ye be made whole?*” There is a richer fountain provided than that of Bethesda: the “fountain opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.” Unlike the pool of Bethesda, this precious fountain of the Redeemer’s blood is not operative only at particular seasons: at every moment it is effectual. We need not wait for the descent of an angel from heaven to give it virtue. At all times when we feel our spiritual sickness, and are desirous of health, we may enter into it and be made whole. This fountain does not confine its efficacy merely to the individual who first enters into it. Its virtue cannot be exhausted, and none need fear for himself, because his neighbour has experienced its healing influence before him. To find it we need not make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, or be carried up to some distant city. In every spot of the earth we may enjoy its salutary influences. We need not fear like this poor sufferer because of our infirmity: not the most active, but the most humble, shall here obtain the cure.

How obstinate and how criminal must we be, if these offers are still in vain! If when such provision is made for our salvation, we still perish, must we not perish under the agonizing conviction that our destruction is owing entirely to ourselves; to our contempt of the offered grace of the Saviour; to our wilful rejection of that felicity which was freely held out to us?

After these remarks, we return to the paralytic, whose history is given in the text. We attempt not to describe the variety of emotions which crowded upon his heart, when he considered his perfect and unexpected restoration to health. Joy, surprise, gratitude, doubtless affected him by turns. But in



vain he sought for his Deliverer. Whilst the crowd were collecting to view this prodigy, Jesus passed through the midst of them, and disappeared before the paralytic had time to know who it was that cured him, or to return his thanks to him. Thus unable to testify his gratitude to his Benefactor, he neglected not that which he owed to his God. He immediately goes to the temple. For many years, his disease had deprived him of the consolation of joining in the public exercises of religion; but having recovered his health, his first care is to enter those consecrated walls, to which gratitude, as well as piety, conduct him. What a reproof does his conduct give to many among us, who, rescued from some great danger, or delivered from some dangerous sickness, neglect to perform towards God a duty so just and indispensable, and who, instead of going with solicitude into the temple of the Lord, fly into the world to carry to it the first homages of their deliverance or recovery! The paralytic did not act thus odiously. In the midst of the joy produced by his cure, he forgets not what he owes to God and his Benefactor. "In the courts of the Lord's house, in the presence of all his people, he pays his vows to the Lord, and offers to him the sacrifice of thanksgiving." Gratitude is never unrewarded. He receives a second favour from God, more inestimable than the former. Since he knew not who it was that cured him, he could not believe on the Son of God, with whom he was unacquainted, or derive from his recovery to health any advantage for the salvation of his soul. But the temporal cures that Jesus wrought for the sick were, generally, preparatory to those spiritual blessings which he had resolved to grant them. He, therefore, generally, after having cured the body,

revealed himself to the souls of those whom he had benefited, and produced in them a lively and saving faith. Thus, on the present occasion, he recompensed the gratitude of the paralytic by letting him know to whom he was indebted for his cure. To this information, which filled this poor man with joy, Jesus added an exhortation which must have made a strong impression upon his mind: "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." The Saviour first recalls to his mind the blessing which he had received. He requires him to reflect attentively on the greatness of the miracle; to weigh all its circumstances; to compare his past misery, that state of infirmity and suffering in which he had so long languished, with that state of health and vigour which he now enjoyed; that by this comparison he might more sensibly feel the value and the greatness of the benefit. "*Behold, thou art made whole.*"

To the remembrance of the benefit, Jesus joins a remonstrance. It is, that he should be careful not to relapse into the sin which had been forgiven him. "*Sin no more.*" The miseries and sufferings of this life are sometimes chastisements from God, punishments which he inflicts on us because of our sins. In confirmation of this, you will immediately recollect a great number of examples, both in the Old Testament and the New. I need mention to you but a single one. It is that of the sicknesses and premature deaths with which the church of Corinth was afflicted in the time of St. Paul, and which the apostle expressly assures us, were the punishment of their profanation of the Lord's table.

But if the evils of this life are *sometimes* marks of the anger of God against our sins; they are not so

*always, nor even generally.* They are much more frequently, as the Scriptures assure us, testimonies of the love and kindness of the Lord towards his children, whom he thus exercises by trials and afflictions, in order to prepare them more fully for the kingdom of heaven. We ought, then, to abstain from judging of the virtues or vices of a man by his outward condition. There is injustice and impiety in those cruel judgments, which lead persons to suppose, merely because great afflictions happen to their neighbour, that therefore he has, by some great sin, offended God. This was the reasoning of the friends of Job, whom God so severely censured. This was the reasoning of the inhabitants of Malta, when they saw a viper fastening on the hand of Paul, after his escape from the shipwreck. But to reason thus, to maintain that those who are most afflicted in the world are the most culpable, is to contradict experience, which shows us that the greatest saints have often undergone the severest trials; it is arrogantly to intrude into the secret counsels of God; it is to expose ourselves to make rash, false, and unjust judgments.

In the present case, however, none of these evils were to be apprehended; since it is Jesus Christ himself, who searches all hearts and knows all events, who teaches us that the sufferings of this man proceeded from his sins; that his sickness was sent him in punishment for some particular crime. Knowing how common it is for those who are delivered from sickness, to forget the vows and promises made in affliction, Jesus recalls to him the crimes which had caused his misery, and exhorts him to avoid them in future. “*Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more.*”

To this exhortation is added a threatening. The Saviour informs the paralytic, that, however long and painful may have been his illness, something still more distressing might happen to him, if, ungrateful for the benefit which God had granted him, he returned to his evil courses. Perhaps the Saviour spoke of some malady still more afflictive than the former; perhaps he had in view the punishments of the world to come, in comparison with which all the sufferings of this world are unworthy of regard. "*Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee.*"

My brethren, how many of us are there, to whom this concluding address may with propriety be made! How many, whose regrets and tears over their past wanderings God has witnessed when they have been laid on the bed of sickness, who have there solemnly vowed, on their recovery, to turn unto the Lord! How many who, affected by some great mercy, touched by some great deliverance, moved by some circumstances in Providence, or melted under some of the means of grace, have resolved to amend their ways, and to lead holy and heavenly lives! Some persons, who at present have such dispositions, are probably now within the sound of my voice; and if we read over our past lives, there are few who will not find seasons when they had such feelings, and formed such resolutions; although their consciences declare that they no longer possess these feelings, that they have violated these resolutions. To encourage the former class to cherish their holy desire, and to bring the latter to repentance, suffer me briefly to show you how fatal are these relapses into sin; how bitter are the consequences of them: "*Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*"

If in the disorders of the body relapses are dangerous; they are not less so in the disorders of the soul, especially when they are frequent, and when we use few exertions to prevent them. A perpetual vicissitude of vice and virtue, of apparent recoveries and relapses, shows an incorrigible heart, and leads almost certainly to perdition. These few considerations will convince you of this truth.

1. By frequent relapses we become familiarized with crime, and lose that shame and fear of it which first retained us; till at last, emboldened by custom, we come to "glory in our shame." Conscience, the heavenly witness that God has placed within us, will for some time elevate its voice; will cry, will threaten, will reproach the sinner with his baseness and ingratitude. But at last it will become weary of useless remonstrances, and entirely cease to speak.

2. Relapses into sin, after the Spirit has moved upon our heart, highly offend God, and lead him to abandon the sinner, by totally withdrawing from him his light and his spiritual gifts. For, however immense is the patience of God, however great his long-suffering; yet this patience has its bounds; this long-suffering may be exhausted by the ingratitude and hardness of the human heart. When exhortations, remonstrances, benefits, sicknesses, afflictions, are all found ineffectual in preventing us from constantly relapsing into sin, God, weary of waiting for the sinner, suspends the influences of his love and grace, withdraws his gifts and his favours, abandons the sinner to himself, and leaves him to fill up the measure of his iniquities.

3. God thus abandoning him, must he not be sealed up in final impenitence, and become the victim of eternal death? For where will he find motives or

strength to repent? All the motives which religion offers have a thousand times been presented to his mind without rendering him more faithful to his promises. The idea of death, which may surprise him every hour; the fear of a judgment, of a hell, of an eternity of misery; all these truths have lost their force and influence on him; they make no impression upon his soul; he views them without emotion, and without fear. Or rather, he refuses to think of them; he accustoms himself to live in sin, without considering the terrible consequence of it. He has a fatal peace in the midst of his wanderings, and "*treasures up wrath against the day of wrath.*" Oh! how deplorable, how pitiable is this state! Surely, the sinner himself would tremble, if he knew all its horror and misery.

I do not carry further these reflections. I do not show you, in detail, all the miseries which are produced by thus quenching the Spirit, and relapsing into sin. In order to move you, it surely is not necessary that your ministers should perpetually thunder, and open to your eyes the abysses of hell, in which the sinner is precipitated by his impenitence and disregard of the means which God employs for his salvation. No! my brethren, no! I love to believe that affection, gratitude, will have more effect upon your hearts, than fear of the judgments of God. I love to believe that the consideration of what Jesus Christ hath done for you, of the blood which he hath shed for the remission of your sins, will engage you to redouble your vigilance to resist sin, to guard against relapses, and to cherish the influences of the Holy Ghost. God has so much loved you, that, unless your hearts be totally insensible, you must strive to live in constant communion with him. May we thus

live; may we in future obey thy voice, blessed Jesus, saying to us, "Sin no more."

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## SERMON LII.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XIX.

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SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.

MATTHEW xii. 22—32.

WE have seen in several instances, in the course of these lectures, that whilst our Lord was upon earth, Satan was permitted to afflict the bodies of men, in a visible and tremendous manner. Whilst our Lord was in Galilee, and probably in Capernaum, there was brought to him a demoniac who was both blind and dumb. Though he was silent, his wants spoke for him, and moved the compassionate heart of the Saviour, who immediately and perfectly cured him. The people, struck with astonishment, immediately concluded that Jesus was the promised Messiah, who was to descend from David. But the pharisees, who were filled with enmity against the Saviour, who were hardened against conviction, and resolved not to believe in Jesus, whatever proofs he might give of his divine commission, although they

could not deny the reality of the miracle, endeavoured to persuade the people that it was wrought by confederacy with Beelzebub, and that Christ was only a magician, who cast out devils by the aid of the prince of devils. "Jesus," says the Evangelist, "knew their thoughts." He perceived that this opinion (if it were really their opinion) proceeded not from the weakness of their judgments, but from the malignity of their hearts. But probably it was not their real sentiment, but only an assertion made contrary to their conviction, in order to prevent the people from believing on Jesus. Instead, therefore, of deserving pity for their mistake or ignorance, they merited the severest censures; and accordingly we perceive our Lord severely reproaching them, after he has repelled this calumny.

To show the absurdity of supposing that he was aided by Beelzebub, he bids the pharisees remember, that on this supposition, the devils would assist in overturning their own empire, and that it is not to be imagined that beings like them, who are endowed with immense subtlety and wicked prudence, would aid in subverting their own kingdom, and would not feel the necessity of union among themselves. "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand; and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself: how then shall his kingdom stand?"

Our Saviour adds, "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils; by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges." We learn from the Acts of the Apostles, and from Josephus, that in the time of our Saviour, there were among the Jews many exorcists, who pretended to eject



evil spirits. These were probably, in general, of the sect of the pharisees, and their claims to this power were not questioned by their brethren. Jesus Christ, to silence them, here addresses them on their own principles, without, however, asserting the reality of the ejections in which they believed; and reproaches them with their inconsistency in imputing his cure of demoniacs to Beelzebub, when they ascribe to God the pretended success of their own exorcisms; and at the same time he taxes them as persons of the most shameless disposition, and guilty of a malicious and wicked obstinacy, in countenancing the grossest impostures, while they resisted a miracle supported by the clearest evidence.\*

“How can one enter into a strong man’s house,” continues our Saviour, “and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house?” Nothing can be more striking than this representation. It is as though our Lord had said, ‘When you see a person enter into the house of a bold and resolute enemy, bind him, deprive him of his wealth, and reduce him to distress and penury; can you suppose that the vanquished person assisted his conqueror, and was pleased with his subjection? This is an image of what passes between me and Satan. The whole business of my life is to oppose and destroy him; and when I dispossess him, it is plain that he obeys me, not from choice, but necessity, and because I am stronger than he.’

Our Lord concludes his vindication of himself from their calumny, by reminding them of a proverbial saying, common among them, “He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with

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\* See Farmer on Miracles, p. 272.

me scattereth abroad;" the import of which maxim is, 'He that is not my friend, is my enemy.' You see immediately the application of this saying. 'If it be a common maxim, that he is to be regarded as an enemy who merely refuses his assistance, how can you esteem me the friend and confederate of Satan, when I am not merely neutral, but directly engaged in destroying his power, and shaking his dominion in the souls and bodies of men?'

Our Lord then addresses to the pharisees that remarkable declaration, than which few parts of scripture have been more discussed, and concerning which so many volumes have been written: "*Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: But whosoever speaketh a word against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world nor in the world which is to come.*" St. Mark, in the parallel place, adds: "*Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.*"

It would be inconsistent with the limits of these exercises, and the design of these lectures, to examine in detail all the various sentiments which have been entertained concerning this sin against the Holy Ghost. I shall only show you, with as much brevity as will be consistent with perspicuity, what is its real nature.

It appears to me that the great cause of the difficulty which some theologians have found on this subject was, an erroneous opinion that this particular sin was spoken of in Heb. vi. 4—6, and 1 John, v. 16. Let us examine these texts, and if we find that they do not relate to the blasphemy against the

Holy Ghost, we shall be able easily to ascertain the precise nature of this crime. *“It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”*

One consideration is sufficient to prove that this cannot be the sin against the Holy Ghost. The sin which the apostle here describes, evidently could be committed by none except those who were professors of the Christian religion, and who had enjoyed in a high degree the common operations of the Spirit: which surely was not the case with those pharisees whom the Saviour addresses in the text. Besides, in order to consummate the sin against the Holy Ghost, it is necessary that the tongue externally blaspheme; whereas the sin here described by Paul may be perpetrated by the heart, even though the tongue should be silent. The truth is, that the apostle is here speaking of a wilful and total apostacy, whether he refers to real or apparent Christians; and if to the former, how the supposition of their falling away can be reconciled with the doctrine of the saint's perseverance, are subjects foreign from the present discourse.

Neither is the *sin unto death*, spoken of by John, the sin against the Holy Ghost. This apostle says, (1 John, v. 16) *“If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and [God] shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.”*

To understand this verse, you must recall some circumstances in the history of the primitive church.

which are frequently mentioned in the New Testament. At that period God frequently punished with sickness and disorders those who had violated their duty and fallen into sin. I need produce no other example of this than the Corinthian church, in which St. Paul teaches us many were sick, and many died, because of their profanation of the Lord's supper. Among the extraordinary gifts communicated to the primitive church, was the faith of miracles, which, in the person about to work the miracle, was a full assurance supernaturally infused, that God would be present with him, and enable him to perform it.

These well-known facts explain this text. Its meaning may be conveyed in the following paraphrase: 'If any brother fall into a sin which is punished by a temporal disorder, and you discover by the gift of discerning spirits, and by the faith of miracles, that this disorder will not terminate in death, you shall pray for him; and God, in answer to the prayer of faith, will restore him to health. But if, when thus sick as a punishment for his sin, you have no such assurance that God will restore him, as will enable you to pray with miraculous faith, you must not ask for his restoration to health. You may pray that he may repent; you may pray for his salvation; but knowing (as in such a case you must know) that he has committed a sin unto *temporal* death, you must, in this respect, submit to the appointment of God.' This I suppose to be the import of this verse. From the many reasons which lead me to suppose that the *sin unto death* is unto temporal and not eternal death, I have time to select only a few. Unless we adopt this interpretation, we make the apostle give a direction which is useless as to all practical influence upon the conduct: since no man

can be assured that another has committed the unpardonable sin, and since we are bound to pray for all men without exception. According to our interpretation, it was a direction suited and necessary to the state of the church at that time, and which might daily be a directory to their conduct.

Again, the *death* here spoken of must be of the same kind with the life that was given in answer to prayer: according as this life is eternal, so must be the death. Now who does not know that God never gives eternal life merely in answer to the prayers of another mortal; no man ever received it without personal piety, personal sanctification, and personal devotions. God has frequently given temporal life in consequence of the prayers of the pious. The life then here spoken of must be temporal, and so then must be the death. And finally, the phrase is thus used in several parts of scripture. In a variety of places in the Pentateuch, which we have translated "*a sin worthy of death,*" it is in the original, simply "a sin unto death:" and in these places there can be no question that the *death* is a temporal one. This phrase then was familiar to the Jews, and when used by a Jew in the New Testament, we must annex to it that sense which it uniformly bears in the writings of his countrymen.

Laying aside then this verse as of no moment in the present inquiry, we find that the only passages in the scripture which speak of the sin against the Holy Ghost are, our text, with the parallel passages in Mark iii. 28, and Luke xii. 10. When we carefully consider these texts, and attend to the circumstances in which they were uttered, we must, I think, conclude, that

*The sin against the Holy Ghost consists in ascribing the miracles wrought by Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Ghost, to the devil; while those who thus blasphemed were actuated by envy, malice, pride, and other malignant passions, or spoke against conviction and the light of their conscience.*

This definition is calculated to afford relief to those timid consciences which are agitated with fear, lest they have committed this crime. They form false ideas of the nature of it, and then give themselves up to despair. Every gross sin committed against knowledge and conscience is not this sin, nor every denial of Christ's miracles, nor every denial of the divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit, nor every blasphemous suggestion of Satan, nor every sin against grace received, nor every malicious persecution of Christianity, nor every resisting, opposing, and quenching the motions of the spirit; for many thousand persons who have committed these sins have afterwards repented and been forgiven, have become ornaments of the church on earth, and received the crown of glory beyond the grave.

But why is this sin unpardonable? Not from any defect of mercy in God, or merit in Christ; but partly from the nature of the sin, which precludes the possibility of repentance by rejecting the Holy Ghost, the only principle of penitence, and partly from the positive determination of God who, for reasons no doubt infinitely wise, has thought proper, as one expresses it, "to set a dreadful mark of distinction on this blasphemy, and make it death, eternal death, without reprieve."

What effect shall this subject have upon you? Shall it flatter your pride? Shall it give you high ideas of your virtues, because you cannot recognise

yourselves in the portrait which has been traced? Will you boast that your corruption is not extreme, that there is one point of horror at which you have not arrived? Because your wounds are not desperate, will you neglect them? Because your repentance is possible, will you wait till it be impracticable?

Who can be animated with this fury? What enchanted conscience can remain tranquil, because it has not committed this sin? Why is this sin so formidable? Because it casts into hell. So do others. But there is this difference: here it is without resource; there, there is a resource in conversion. Pause then, my brethren, in your career to misery, and repent. Stifle the convictions of conscience, resist the influences of the Spirit no longer. Fly to Jesus, and he will make your sins, which "are as scarlet, white as snow."

## SERMON LIII.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XX.



THE WOMAN WHO WAS A SINNER.

LUKE vii. 36—50.

THE history contained in this passage beautifully and impressively illustrates the most striking feature of the gospel, that boundless and infinite grace, which is the only refuge of the guilty, the only asylum of the perishing. Jesus “came to seek and to save that which was lost;” and in his instructions and promises, through his merits, his sacrifice, and his Spirit, the deepest guilt may find pardon, the most polluted soul acquire the beauties of holiness, and the heart crushed with sorrow obtain consolation and peace. Blessed be God for that system of mercy, by which the degraded and ruined children of men may be rescued from condemnation and misery, and be brought to repentance, purity, and bliss. Blessed be that Saviour, who was a living illustration of the spirit and design of the gospel; “who went about doing good” to the ignorant, the depraved, the forlorn: the stream of whose benevolence bore down all obstructions that opposed it, and proved wherever it flowed, “the water of life.” While we are meditating on that touching exhibition of his benignity



and kindness, that is recorded in the text, may our hearts burn with warmer love towards him, and our minds be filled with higher and more endearing views of the immensity of his grace.

A pharisee, named Simon, had invited the Saviour to dine with him. None were more bitter enemies to Jesus than these proud and haughty men, who, confident of their own righteousness, felt not their need of pardoning mercy; yet, even among them, there were some of better dispositions, some who, like Nicodemus and Saul of Tarsus, became afterwards disciples of the Redeemer. With the particular character of Simon we are unacquainted, nor can we tell the precise motives which induced him to invite Jesus. Perhaps he had been, in a degree, affected by the solemn exhortations of the Redeemer, and wished to converse more fully with him, or more probably, as we conclude, from his omitting the ordinary marks of respect, which the Jews at their entertainments paid to those who were valued by them, he was influenced by curiosity, or had some ensnaring design. Whatever was his motive, Jesus, ever ready to promote the salvation of his most inveterate enemies, went to his house. His religion did not drive him to a desert or a cloister; it is characterized by active benevolence. He refused not to eat with Zaccheus, Levi, and other publicans: he rejected not the invitation of the deluded pharisees, but seized every opportunity of instructing them both by word and example. His object was to benefit all classes; the self-righteous formalist, as well as the open sinner.

In the city resided a woman who had been notoriously wicked, and whose life had probably been stained by impurity. Of her name we are entirely

ignorant; for though some have confounded her with Mary Magdalene, and others with Mary, the sister of Lazarus, the Evangelists give not the smallest support to either of these opinions. She had heard some of the instructions of the Saviour: while listening to him, she had seen her sinfulness and her misery; she had been deeply penetrated with a sense of her guilt, and inspired with penitence. But, though filled with the deepest compunction, and trembling under a consciousness of her unworthiness, she does not entirely despair: she remembers the grace and condescension of Jesus; his acts of benevolence and mercy, which she had witnessed, or of which she had heard; the tender and encouraging invitations to all troubled and labouring souls which he has uttered; and she resolves to go to him, to pour out before him her tears, and to seek from him pardon and peace. She would not have dared thus to approach the haughty pharisees, who would have dismissed her with scorn, or sunk her in despondency, by teaching her that she was lost without resource; but attracted by the compassion of Jesus, who was as benignant and good as he was great and holy, she feared not thus to cast herself upon his mercy. No obstacles shall restrain her; her heart is so full, that it will break if its feelings are not expressed. The entrance into Simon's house will probably be condemned as impertinent and obtrusive. The pharisees, who were there at meat with the Saviour, will probably view her with indignant aversion and supercilious contempt; but she despises the shame; she is indifferent to the reproaches of the world; she is willing to endure scorn and insult, if she may approach to the Saviour; no matter for the contumelies of the pharisees, if she is not spurned.

by this good Shepherd. "No inconvenience," says Bishop Hall, in speaking of this woman, "can prevent the penitent soul from a speedy recurrence to Christ. She says not, If Jesus were in the field, or in the street, or in the house of some humble publican, or any where save with a pharisee, I would come to him; now, I would rather defer my access than find reproach and censure. It is not for the penitent and the believing to be timorous. O, Saviour! if thou be on the other side of the sea, a Peter will leap into the sea and swim to thee; if on the other side of the fire, the blessed martyrs will run through the flames to thee. We deserve not the comfort of thy presence, if, wheresoever we know thou art, though the way thither be through reproaches and afflictions, we do not come to thee."

You know that the Jews, as well as most of the ancient nations, instead of sitting at their meals, reclined upon couches, with their shoes or sandals taken off. This was the posture in which Jesus and the other guests were, when this penitent woman entered the room. She placed herself behind the couch, at his feet, mingling with the servants. Sensible as she was of his grace and compassion, yet the deep conviction of her sins would not permit her to look in his face. With what delight did she listen to all he said! Every word that he uttered penetrated her heart: her penitence, her gratitude, her admiration, her love, caused her to weep in such abundance, that her tears trickled down upon the feet of Jesus, and bathed them: observing them wet, she wiped them with the tresses of her hair, which was now loose and dishevelled, in sign of her penitence and sorrow. She kissed them, (which, as you observe in many parts of the Scripture, was not an unusual mode of express-

ing reverence and regard,) to testify her adoring affection to the Redeemer of sinners. She thought, "they are the feet of that good Shepherd, who came down from heaven, who followed me into the wilderness to save me;" and then again new floods of tears streamed over them.

It was customary in the eastern countries, at entertainments, to pour fragrant oils on the heads of such guests as they designed particularly to honour. She had with her an alabaster box of precious perfume: lowly and abased, she dares not approach the head of the Saviour; but shows at once her love and her humility, by anointing his feet. It is a silent thank-offering to him who had restored her lost peace, and led her back to the ways of virtue; for during all this time she spoke nothing; but how eloquent were her tears and her actions!

The pharisee, however, knowing the dissolute life of this woman, and knowing little of the nature, design, and spirit of the gospel; instead of cherishing the returning virtue of this unhappy wanderer from the ways of God; instead of admiring the grace of the Redeemer, immediately concludes that Jesus cannot be a prophet, since he suffers this woman to touch and anoint him, instead of instantly expelling her from his presence, as the tradition of the elders required. "*He said within himself, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who, and what manner of woman this is which touched him; for she is a sinner.*" He erred alike with respect to the character of Jesus, and that of the woman who now viewed with abhorrence her sins. He erred also with respect to his own character. Had he known it aright, instead of being offended with Jesus, touched and delighted with his grace, he would have thrown himself at his

fect, exclaiming, "Lord be merciful to me also, who am a sinner."

How odious is that disposition which leads persons thus to reproach the truly penitent with the irregularities of their past lives! Where iniquity has been truly bewailed, and entirely forsaken by any transgressors; where God has forgiven their sins and received them into his favour, we should surely, instead of imitating the haughty pharisee, forget those vices of our brethren that have been mourned and pardoned, or remember them only to admire the riches of divine grace, and the compassion of the Saviour.

Jesus proves to Simon, that he is the prophet of Israel, by speaking to him of his unuttered thoughts. He did not publicly reprove him; but with delicacy, wisdom, and benignity, led him to confess his error, while he justified his own conduct to the penitent woman. "*And Jesus said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor who had two debtors, the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.*" Ah! I see the attention of the penitent redouble; she penetrates the design of the Saviour; she waits with anxiety to hear what was the doom of that debtor who owed most, for she feels that that debtor is herself; her heart leaps when Jesus adds, "*And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.*" The tears again burst from her eyes, but they are tears of joy, at the doctrine of unmerited mercy and grace. To the question of the Saviour, "*Which of them will love him most?*" Simon replies, "*I suppose that he to whom he forgave most:*" an answer which the Saviour commends.

The application of this parable to the occasion on which it was uttered, is evident. It is as though

Jesus had said, ‘ According to your own confession, love to me will be proportioned to the sense that persons have of the greatness of their sins, and of the necessity and worth of a full and free pardon. On this account, you, who suppose you have few transgressions, would be little affected at the tidings of forgiveness; but this woman, who has felt the greatness of her guilt, has discovered a warm love and gratitude for pardoning mercy; and it would be utterly inconsistent with my character and office, to reject one whose heart is humbled by repentance, and glowing with affection.’

Before we proceed in the history, let us apply this parable to ourselves: we are all these debtors to God; whatever difference there may be in our characters and conduct, we are sinners, and the justice of Jehovah has solemn claims upon us. We are unable to satisfy the claims of divine justice, and to atone for our violations of the divine law. Happy for us that when we come to God, through Christ, feeling and acknowledging our inability, there is full forgiveness. In this manner only can we obtain pardon. The comparative smallness of our debt affords no claim for forgiveness. Whether indebted fifty or five hundred pence; whether we have been decent formalists, or profligate offenders, we can have no other available plea, than free and unmerited grace.

Our Saviour directly applied the parable he had uttered. “ *He turned to the woman*” that countenance which shone with compassion and benignity, “ *and said, Simon, seest thou this woman,*” this wicked, wandering child, whose past irregularities thou so carefully rememberest, overlooking, or forgetting, her present sentiments? I behold her heart; I see the source

of all those attentions which have been paid by her, but neglected by thee. “*I entered into thine house; thou gavest me no water for my feet;*” one of the acts of eastern hospitality to the stranger and the guest; “*but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head: thou gavest me no kiss*” of friendship and respect; the salutation with which it was then customary for the master of the house to receive those who entered it; “*but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet,*” in token of the deepest reverence, as well as affection. “*My head with oil thou didst not anoint,*” although few entertainments fail of being attended with this circumstance: “*but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.*” He adds, that this her regard for him proceeded solely from a sense of the favour he had done her, in bringing her to repentance, and bestowing pardon on her. “*Wherefore, I say unto you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven her; for,*” or rather therefore,\* “*she loved much,*” as she has manifested by these expressions of affection, and of a grateful heart: “*but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little,*” as would be the case with thee, Simon, if pardon were announced to thee, because thou ignorantly imaginest thy guilt to be trifling.

How attentive is our blessed Saviour to every act of the true penitent. He beholdeth the returning prodigal “*while yet a great way off,*” and marks the faintest desires of holiness. While pursuing his discourse with Simon, he seemed as though he had not observed this woman, yet he had noticed every tear, had regarded every emotion of her heart, and was “*waiting to be gracious.*” He is as careful of thee,

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\* ὅτι, signum remissionis, non causa.

poor penitent. He observes all thy secret sighs, and struggles, and conflicts; and he will in the proper season cause light and consolation to beam upon thee.

Jesus then immediately addressed the woman, and with a voice of mingled authority and tenderness said unto her, "*Thy sins are forgiven thee.*" Numerous as her offences had been, they were all without exception blotted from the book of God's remembrance. The Evangelist attempts not to describe her conduct and her feelings, but we can easily imagine her grateful looks, her silent rapture. Believer, recall thine own emotions when thou first wast enabled to lay hold by a lively faith on the sacrifice of Jesus, and to cry, "he loved *me*, he gave himself for *me*." Such were the joys of this penitent; joys to be exceeded only by the final acquittal of the sinner, and his complete justification at the judgment-day.

A different effect was produced upon those who sat at meat with the Redeemer. They were indignant that he should not only neglect the tradition of the elders, by suffering himself to be touched by a sinner, but that he should also claim the power of dispensing pardon. "*They began to say, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?*" Jesus, disregarding their censures, confirms to her the joyful tidings that her iniquities are pardoned, and her soul saved. "*Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace.*" What gratitude and transport did these words inspire! How did they enable her to pass through life under a sense of the divine favour! How did the recollection of them support her on the bed of death! With what ecstasy does she still remember them now that, instead of weeping at the feet of Jesus, she is participating in his glory.



1. Admire, in reviewing this history, the *grace of the gospel, and the abounding compassion of the Redeemer*. Salvation is freely offered to all: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief of sinners. Even those who are loaded with the scorn and contempt of the world, are invited to him. However aggravated their guilt, his blood can atone for it. Flee to him then, sinner, as the only foundation of thy hope. Look with confidence to him, thou poor penitent, whose heart is well nigh broken at the recollection of thy crimes: "He will not break thee, thou bruised reed; he will not quench thee, thou smoking flax."

2. Admire the *power of the gospel of Jesus*. We have said, and we repeat it with exultation, it is a religion calculated for the guilty and forlorn children of men; but remember, that it opens no asylum to criminals, as such. The most abandoned and profligate are indeed permitted and invited to flee into the church of the Redeemer, as a sanctuary, but it does not protect them in their crimes: in it they are to be changed, to be regenerated; and by the power of the Redeemer the most wonderful moral transformations have been effected: in "the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness," those who have been "justified," have also "been washed and sanctified." When systems of philosophy, and forms of religion, and codes of law, have utterly failed, the power of the gospel has been mighty and effectual. The most abandoned sinners have through it acquired a virtue elevated and refined. Their lustre of holiness has accompanied them to the end of life, has irradiated the chamber of disease, has encircled the brow of death with ineffable glory. Who can fail to admire the power displayed. not merely in the

woman whose history we have considered, but in ten thousand other instances; a power which turns the current of the soul, and makes filthiness itself pure as the "crystal river before the throne of God and the Lamb?"

3. See the *necessity of repentance, of faith, and of love*. If like this woman you would be pardoned, you must exercise the graces which she displayed. When the gospel proclaims forgiveness, it does not represent guilt as less enormous than we had imagined. On the contrary, it points to Calvary, to the infinite atonement there offered, and in the agonies and blood of the Son of God, shows us what we have deserved. At the view of this sacrifice we must be humbled; from it we must learn to loathe ourselves for our transgressions; we must take it as our only plea for pardon; believing in the Saviour, our hearts must glow with love for his perfections and his mercies. Abandoning our transgressions, we must express our love by publicly owning this Saviour, by seeking him in all his ordinances, by the constant exercise of gratitude, by sacrifices for him, by continual attempts to honour him; and after having done all in our power, by weeping at his feet as unworthy. Thus live, and he whom you thus serve will testify his approbation, not merely before a company of pharisees, but before the assembled universe.

4. Let the *self-righteous tremble*. Alas! the race of pharisees is not extinct. The name has ceased among us, but the temper still is found. How many, because they are not chargeable with gross sins; because they are regular in their external conduct, and give some alms to the poor, and are exact in

their performance of the outward duties of religion, suppose they have little need of the grace of the Redeemer; and love him feebly; and censure all who warmly express their affection as hypocrites or enthusiasts; who, while they approve of zeal in every thing else, condemn it only in religion. Alas! to this temper, which so much resembles that of Simon, no promise of pardon is made. The soul must be bowed down under a sense of sin, and animated by love, before it will hear that joyful declaration, "Thy sins are forgiven; thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

5. Finally, Christian, let this history more *endear thy Saviour to thee*. The kind friend of man, he with love conducts the erring into the way of truth, and consoles and refreshes the heavy laden, penitent sinner. The most holy of beings, he is also the most gracious. Thou hast tasted his pardoning love; thou hast partaken of his mercies. Praise, love, adore him daily, with greater constancy and zeal.

## SERMON LIV.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XXI.



THE SYRO-PHŒNICIAN WOMAN.

MAT. XV. 28.

*Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith : be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.*

JESUS came to break down the separating wall between Jew and Gentile ; to offer an atonement sufficient for the sins of the world ; and to announce a system of religion suited to every people and to every land. Though his personal ministry was devoted to the Jews, to whom he had been promised, in whose prophetic writings his character, his office, the time of his advent, had been foretold ; who, as they had been the depositary of that great truth, the unity of the Godhead, amidst the general idolatry of the nations, had also been pointed out as the source whence the fuller and more attractive revelations of God by the Messiah should be diffused through the world. Yet, like the ancient prophets, he had often foretold the vocation of the Gentiles ; had declared that “ many should come from the east and the west,

and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of God." As his ministry upon earth was hastening to a conclusion, he gave an emblem, a prelude of this calling of the Gentiles, in the blessings which he bestowed upon the Canaanitish woman. He consecrated her as part of the first fruits of this vocation. He taught his disciples, by his mercy to her, the blessings that his salvation would communicate to the perishing. On this account, as well as from the more direct instructions which it conveys, her history deserves our serious attention.

The blessed Redeemer had departed, for a short time, from Galilee, and came to the northern borders of Palestine, in the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon. It was a tract of country inhabited partly by Jews, and partly by the descendants of those Canaanites who were not entirely expelled when the Israelites took possession of the land. The female in our text was one of these last, one of that nation lying under the curse, and not enjoying the privileges of the covenant. She is called by Mark a *Syro-Phœnician*, a name given to the Canaanites who resided in Syria, to distinguish them from those who dwelt in Africa, and were termed *Lybo-Phœnicians*, or Carthaginians. But there were some of this nation, odious for its crimes, who repented, were converted, and became worshippers of the true God, such as Rahab and others. This, however, was not the case with the woman whose history we are considering. She was, says the Evangelist, "a Greek," a word which, in the New Testament, is often used as synonymous with idolater. The reason is well assigned by Bishop Horsley; "Because idolatry, in its worst form, the worship of the images of dead men prevailed more among the Greeks than the nations of the east; such

idolaters, of whatever country they might be, were, by the Jews of the apostolic age, called Greeks; just as among us, any one who lives in the communion of the Roman Church, though he be a Frenchman, or a Spaniard, is called a Roman Catholic."

Such was the character of this woman. She was probably a widow, and had an only daughter, to whom she was tenderly attached, and who was "grievously vexed by a devil." This deplorable state, against which all human resources were impotent, was announced according to the frequent representations of the scriptures, by extraordinary symptoms, and by frightful convulsions. Those whom these spirits tormented, afflicted in body and in mind, were a prey to violent assaults of rage and phrenzy. Sometimes they wandered in deserts, or retired to remote sepulchres. Sometimes, in order to restrain their fury, it was necessary to bind them in chains. I have remarked to you, in the course of these lectures, that it was consistent with the wisdom of God to permit Satan, during the residence of the Saviour upon earth, to exercise a greater dominion over the bodies of men than he has since been allowed to exercise; that by his forcible expulsion the superior authority of the Son of God might be manifested. This proud and malignant enemy to human happiness and holiness, knowing that the time of his defeat, by the sacrifice of Jesus, was rapidly advancing, redoubles his rage, and makes his most furious assaults. As at the end of the world, he shall, by divine permission, come from his prison in great wrath, and with all his power, that the last act of God's justice upon him, may be the more striking, because the malice and fury of Satan had been unrestrained; so when Jesus "came to destroy the works

of the devil," this apostate spirit was permitted to put forth all his strength, that his impotence and weakness, when opposed to the Redeemer, might more clearly be displayed.

Doubtless this inconsolable mother, whose daughter was thus afflicted, had heard of Jesus. Doubtless the report of his august power, of his tender charity, of his miracles and benefits, had made her think highly of this divine Saviour. She hastens to this physician of the body and the soul, and as soon as she perceives him, she cries to him, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David: my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil."

Oh! how often do afflictions, not merely those which are immediately personal, but those also which affect our relatives and friends, lead us to the Redeemer! How many are now rejoicing in glory, who never properly cried to the Saviour, till the sufferings and tears of their children or connexions drove them to the mercy-seat! Are any of your offspring, or of those whom you love, in distress? Imitate this female in her prayer, and in the characteristics of her prayer.

1. In it we perceive a lively *faith* and *confidence*. "O Lord, thou Son of David." In these few and plain words she acknowledges him to be possessed of boundless power; to be that great deliverer, after whom the Jews had so long sighed. "Have mercy on me." It is as though she had said, 'O thou that calmest the winds and the waves, thou who loosest the tongue of the dumb, who healest the lame, who givest sight to the blind; thou especially who castest out devils, hear my prayer! Thou canst, if thou please, dry up my tears; thou canst restore joy to an unhappy mother, who implores thy succour. Yes, I

know it, I firmly believe it, one word, one single word of thy sacred mouth is enough to restore to my daughter, health, reason, the use of all her faculties. Ah! in mercy pronounce this saving word, speak it, and my daughter shall be healed!

2. We perceive also in this prayer the *profoundest humility*. She cries, and the Lord does not answer. The apostles, astonished at this unusual conduct of their Master, who never before had hesitated to listen to the petitions of the wretched, entreat him to grant her request and dismiss her. Jesus replies, "I am sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." "I must consecrate my ministry to extirpate the errors, to heal the maladies of this privileged nation." Was not this to teach the Syro-Phœnician that the Gentiles, in the number of whom she was, plunged in ignorance, and encompassed by the shadow of death, had no title to aspire to his favours? Immediately afterwards he declared to her, in terms more plain, and more humiliating, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it unto dogs." He uses language that was customary among the Jews, who spoke of themselves as children, and all other nations as dogs. Jesus employs it in order more fully to display her humility, and thus to reprove the Jews; and from the exhibition of her excellence, to show the impropriety of such expressions.

He speaks thus to prove, not to insult her. A soul, I do not say vain and haughty, but a soul that was not profoundly humble, would have been offended. But what was the conduct of the Canaanitish woman? She cast herself at the feet of Him who apparently rejects her, she worships him, she redoubles her entreaties, she cries, "Lord, help me!" When obliged to answer him, she only acknowledges



her unworthiness. "And she said, Truth, Lord." 'I feel too deeply my misery, the abyss of guilt and wretchedness in which I have fallen, to be impatient or offended. I therefore expect nothing from my own merit. It is only on thy beneficent charity, thy power, thy pure grace, that I found all my hopes. Ah! deign only to remember, that "the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table:" this is all I ask. Display before the eyes of thy favoured children all the splendour of thy glory; manifest in the midst of them, in all its plenitude, the majesty which adorns thee; shower down upon them all thine ineffable mercies! Alas! the least ray of this glory, the least emanation of this majesty, the slightest act of this mercy, a single crumb of that bread of life, which thou bestowest on them in so much abundance, is a thousand times more than I deserve—is all that I ask!'

3. To the faith and humility of this tender mother, add her *fervour*, her *zeal*, and *perseverance*. She utters only rapid, energetic expressions, which display all the vehemence of her feelings. She does not merely speak; she *cries* to Jesus. It is not a momentary emotion. She again and again entreats. In vain the charitable Redeemer, in order to prove her, and for ever to instruct his disciples, at first preserves silence, and replies not to her. In vain does he appear to reject her at the time when, prostrate before him, she seems to have used without success every means of securing his aid. Nothing discourages her; obstacles only augment her ardour. She presses, she solicits, she importunes with more earnestness; and the resistance that she experiences only produces perseverance. Like Jacob, in that mysterious wrestling with the angel of the Lord at

the brook Jabbok, she cries, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me!" Like the happy patriarch, she obtains a blessing.

4. And in what did this blessing consist? In praises upon herself and in the healing of her daughter. She is honoured with the approbation of the Lord. There are no more humiliating comparisons, no more apparent contempt, no more trials. The end of this tender mother is accomplished. The merciful Shepherd, who came to seek the lost sheep; the gracious Redeemer, who came to call sinners to repentance—he will not reject the prayer of the humble heart. "*O woman, great is thy faith!*" What exalted praise, when proceeding from the "searcher of hearts," who knoweth what is in man! "*Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt.*" "Since I approve this tender affection, these inquietudes, this hunger, this thirst which made thee come to the fountain of living waters; since I accept the prayer that thou hast addressed to me, go now, and rejoice in the perfect restoration of that daughter who is so dear to thee; go, indulge thyself in all the transports of maternal love; go, teach her to know the author of her deliverance, and to shout with thee the song of praise; and let all future generations learn from thy example to seek the mercies of the Lord by faith, by humility, by perseverance in prayer." "*And her daughter,*" says the Evangelist, "*was made whole from that very hour.*" St. Mark adds, that this affectionate mother, on re-entering into her house, found her delivered from the evil spirit, and tranquilly lying upon the bed.

The beautiful history that we have thus rapidly considered, affords us many instructions. Let us present a few of them.

1. And first let us learn from this Mother *to pray*; to regard this exercise as one of our most indispensable duties. It is constantly enjoined upon us in the word of God, and without it, we in vain hope for holiness, for comfort, for eternal glory. Without it, the Canaanitish woman would have continued wretched; without it, Christian, how miserable should we be! But how cheering is it when considering our constantly recurring wants, our frailty, the lusts of our flesh, the artifices of Satan, the snares and temptations of the world, the multiplied duties we have to perform upon earth, and the solemnities of eternity that await us! How cheering to remember that we may always lift up our suppliant eyes to heaven; that we may always pour out our cares in the bosom of the tenderest and most indulgent of parents; that we may commit our interests, our dearest interests, into the hands of the Most Wise and Most Powerful! And on the contrary, without constant prayer we shall not long be faithful to our duties; we shall soon be vanquished by our enemies. It was only while the arms of Moses were lifted up to heaven that Israel triumphed: when they fell, Amalek prevailed.

2. This mother teaches us again that *we may lawfully ask of God temporal blessings and enjoyments*. It is true that some commentators suppose, that besides the corporeal, she asked also for the spiritual health of her daughter. Even if this were the case, she still asked for the bodily restoration of her child, and obtained it. He who has ordered us to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” does not forbid us to ask for “those earthly things that are convenient for us.” By his order, in our daily requests we say to him, “Give us this day our

daily bread." The advancement of his kingdom, both of grace and glory, the sanctification of his name, the accomplishment of his will, the pardon of our sins, our conversion, our eternal salvation, the "meat which remaineth to eternal life"—these ought to be, without doubt, the first objects of our desires. Add to these also, "the meat which perisheth," temporal advantages, but always with submission, in subordination, and provided they do not interfere with the "one thing needful." The worldling says, 'Lord, give me riches, give me honour, glory, reputation, prosperity;' and he asks nothing more. But the believer says, 'Our Father who art in heaven, sanctify me; render me humble, patient, merciful, just, believing; fit me for the inheritance of the saints in light. And, after that, grant me, according to thy good pleasure, some portion of temporal enjoyments; but, O my God! if the interest of my soul demands it, let me be poor, afflicted, tempted; let me drink the cup of sorrow to the dregs: not my will, but thine be done.' Such is the extent of the objects which our prayers should embrace, and such the order we should observe in our petitions.

3. *The manner in which we should pray*, is the third lesson which is taught by this history. We must exercise *faith*. "If any of you lack wisdom," says St. James, "let him ask it of God, but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." Thus the Saviour often asked of those who came to him for aid, "Believest thou that I can do this?" And to this grace his blessings were attributed, "Thy faith hath saved

thee : go in peace." But it is not a barren, a historic, a dead faith, that is required : with this our prayers may only increase our guilt. Like this mother, we must be *humble*. What is a mortal who prays ? A sinner bent down under the weight of his transgressions, and who, without the infinite mercy of God, could not appear before him ; a poor man who solicits alms ; a sick man who asks for health ; often a dead man, a corrupted corpse that implores resurrection and life. And shall such beings fail to be humble ? Go, proud pharisees, present elsewhere your boasted virtues ! there is no grace, no justification for you in the treasures of the divine mercies. They are open only for the humble publican who confesses his sins, who smites upon his breast, and dares scarcely look up to heaven. These are opened for that prodigal who groans over his vileness, his degradation, his guilt, and who esteems himself happy to be placed among the hired servants of his father. These are opened only for those who say with the Canaanitish woman, "Give me but one crumb of the bread which falleth from thy table ;" or with Jacob, "I am less than the least of all thy mercies."

We must be *fervent* and *persevering*. The soul of him who prays should thirst for God ; should desire his mercies with that lively ardour with which the traveller longs for the cooling stream in the dry and barren land. If God delays, we should wait for him. Is it for us to assign to him the times and seasons ? When for reasons infinitely wise and good, he defers answering our requests, shall we cease to elevate our hearts to him ? His delays are intended to make us feel more sensibly his supreme power, or our unworthiness, or to save us from presumption,

or to make us more value the blessing that is delayed; or to try us, and invigorate our graces. See the examples of the saints in all ages. See this Canaanitish woman: she perseveres, notwithstanding apparent repulses, and secures the blessing.

4. The *efficacy of prayer* is another lesson that she teaches us. I have not time to show you how the perfections, the promises, the engagements of God, assure us of its benefit; nor to present the examples of its efficacy from the beginning of the world to the Canaanitish woman, and from her to us. Wo to those who cannot add their own experience as a proof that the blessings of God are bestowed upon those who humbly worship him in spirit and in truth! Prayer averts from us the evils which threaten us, breaks our fetters, subdues our corruptions, renders us victorious over temptations through Jesus Christ. Prayer impresses on us a filial fear, a holy love to the best of fathers; renders us watchful and circumspect; weakens, destroys our vicious habits; weans us from this world, and causes our soul to take its flight towards heaven; procures for us the richest blessings; secures the protection of God for ourselves, our children, our friends; makes us happy in life, and triumphant in death. Who then will not bless God, who has connected such favours with the most consolatory and honourable of duties?

5. It is also the *most easy of duties when the heart is in a proper frame*, and when suitable dispositions are excited. This is the last instruction given us by this history. We may say of this duty as Moses does of the law: "It is not far from thee, nor high above thee, but nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and thy heart, that thou mayest do it." When the apostles said to the Redeemer, "Lord, teach us to pray," he pre-

scribed to them neither sublime knowledge nor laboured expressions, nor words full of pomp, nor periods arranged with art. No; but he replied to them, "When you pray, say, Our Father who art in heaven;" that is, think of God, speak to him in prayer as to a father, spread before him your wants, and expect his favours.

See then in this Canaanitish woman the art of prayer. It is simply the emotion, the cry, the groan, the desire of the heart: it is an elevation of the soul to God. To direct our heart to God, to feel our necessities, the weight of our guilt; to desire deliverance from Christ; to cry, "Lord, have mercy upon me—help me!" This is all that is necessary to form a prayer. And does not every thing around us at once assist and urge to this duty? In looking up to the heavens, is it difficult to say in our heart, "There dwell my Creator, my Redeemer; there is the country of the believer; let my conversation be in heaven." In considering the earth, so mutable and unsatisfying, is it difficult to cry, "Lord, detach my heart from all that is perishable; turn away my eyes from beholding vanity?" In reflecting upon the sacred bonds which unite us to mankind, is it difficult to cry, "Heavenly Father, console the afflicted, enlighten the blind, shed down thy blessings upon thy children?" In entering into the temple, is it difficult to cry, "Lord, create in me a clean heart, and renew a right within me. Let my prayers and praises mingle with those of the church universal; with those of angels and glorified saints?" In lying down in the evening, is it difficult to adore Him who may make us find in sleep the image of death, death itself; to say to him, "I commit my soul into thy hands; in thy paternal bosom I would slumber?"

In rising in the morning, is it difficult to render our first homages to Him, to whom we are indebted for every thing; to thank him for the life he yet continues, to devote ourselves anew to him, and to consecrate to his glory and your salvation the day that you owe to his love? In seating yourselves at the table, is it difficult to recall for an instant Him who supplies our returning wants, and opens our hearts to the sweet sentiments of gratitude? In beginning, continuing, terminating our labours, is it difficult to say, "O God, without whom all efforts are unavailing, bless my studies, my commerce, my occupations?" In the midst of the distractions of the world, would it interrupt our pleasures or diminish their vivacity, to purify, to sanctify, to ennoble them, by the tender remembrance of our Benefactor, by some effusions of love, by the flight of the heart to him? Thus every thing can animate us, worms of the dust! God permits, God orders us to speak to him. The access to the throne of mercy is open; he continually calls us; he requires only the voice of the heart. Oh! there is no difficulty in prayer, except that which results from the coldness and ingratitude and unbelief of our hearts. Did we feel like the Canaanitish woman, we should easily find words to express our sorrows, or to utter our joys.

And now, my brethren, in what manner ought we to conclude this discourse? Shall we cry, "O people, great is your faith!" or shall we weep at our neglect of our duties? Judge yourselves which is the most proper termination. Are there none of you who never pray? Are there none of you who pray but seldom? Covered with guilt, you seek not for deliverance. Encompassed by the mercies of God, you live without thinking of him. And of



those who regularly offer up their petitions to God, what is the subject of their prayers? Is it to be delivered from the demon of pride, of avarice, of voluptuousness? Is it to obtain those graces, without which you are lost for ever? Is it to become more like the Redeemer?

And with what dispositions are these prayers made? Where is the humility of the soul? Where the firm faith, the enlightened and persevering zeal, which distinguished this Canaanitish woman in her approach to the Lord? It is not then surprising that our prayers are not more effectual; that too often, like Nadab and Abihu, we draw down the anger of God by burning incense with strange fire; by presenting our prayers with unhallowed dispositions.

My brethren, let us learn at last to pray as Christians, as creatures redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus, and destined to immortality. Fathers and mothers, such are the supplications that you ought to offer for yourselves, for your children from their tenderest youth. Through your prayers and cares, let the first employment of their tongues when they are unloosed, be to glorify their Creator. Christians, form such prayers for yourselves, your brethren, your pastors, the church, the careless who are perishing around you. Cry earnestly, "Lord, help us!" Though for a time Jesus may defer an answer, yet persevere, and he will at last say to you, "Be it unto you as you will."

## SERMON LV.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XXII.



THE SUFFERINGS OF THE SOUL OF JESUS.

JOHN xii. 27, 28.

*Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.*

WHAT a spectacle! He who is inseparably united to the source of life and felicity, in sorrow; He who is the unfailing fountain of consolation to his children on earth, and of joy to the redeemed in heaven, in trouble and distress! We in vain look for external causes of this wo. There is no scourge, no cross, no executioner. On the contrary, every thing seems calculated to inspire him with delight. The multitude appear, at last, disposed to acknowledge him as the Messiah. He has entered in triumph into Jerusalem, amidst their hosannas. The Greeks have anxiously desired to see him, and thus given an earnest of the ingathering of the Gentiles. Ah, brethren! the pains that Jesus feels are deeper than external

causes could produce. He just touches the moment when he is to be offered up a sacrifice for sin; he begins to feel that wrath of God, which was to be poured out upon him when he stood as the victim of our transgressions. That fire has been kindled, with which he was encompassed in the garden and on the cross, and which would instantly have consumed any being not united to the Godhead.

Entering upon his last conflicts, he cries, "*Now is my soul troubled.*" These *inward* sufferings of our Redeemer were no less necessary than his *external* woes; the *anguish of his soul* was as requisite as the *tortures of his cross*.

1. Sin had defiled our souls as well as our bodies: nay, the soul had been the first source of disobedience; in it the throne of sin and Satan was erected, while the body was used only as its instrument. The punishment denounced against the guilty had respect to our souls more than to our bodies. When Jesus, therefore, appeared as our pledge and surety, to expiate for our offences, to bear in our stead the inflictions of divine justice, it was needful that the agonies of his soul should unite with the pains of his body, in order to pay down a full ransom for us.

2. Besides, one great end of his incarnation and death was, that he might set before us a perfect pattern of holy conduct, a complete example of every virtue; so that in every circumstance we might cast our eyes upon him, and learn our duty. But this great end could never have been accomplished, had our Redeemer experienced no sorrows of the soul, had he been a stranger to inward troubles.

3. And, finally, had only the body of Jesus suffered, we should have been deprived of a large portion of that consolation and support which is now afford-

ed us by remembering the events of his life. Every afflicted Christian has been comforted by recollecting, that “we have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities,” but one who “was in all points tempted as we are,” and who will therefore sympathize with us in all our sorrows. But if Jesus had undergone only the pains of the senses; if at all times he had displayed an unfeeling insensibility, and had appeared uninvested with the innocent passions of our nature; how much would the consolations to be derived from him have been diminished both in extension and force?

Thus, whether we consider Jesus as the propitiation for our sins, or as a pattern of holiness, or as a tender friend, careful of the happiness of those attached to him, we see the necessity of his inward as well as his outward sufferings, and must be supported by recollecting that he here cried, “Now is my soul troubled;” and that he afterwards exclaimed, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful.”

The inward sorrows of men are, it is true, often criminal; because they spring *from an improper source*, from unholy passions or desires, or from defect of submission to the will of God; or because they are *excessive in their degree*, and not proportioned to the causes which excite them; or because they are *pernicious in their effect*, checking our gratitude to God, or causing us to refrain from the performance of duty. But though the blessed Saviour, from the time that he was cradled in the despised manger till he expired upon the bloody cross, scarcely passed a day that did not bring with it something that afflicted his soul: though he, at whose birth angels rejoiced, traversed this valley of tears in sadness and in grief, and found no intermission to the woes of his spirit

till he rested in the tomb; yet his sorrows were ever holy: for in their *source* they were pure; in their *degree*, they did not, they could not, transcend the measure which reason and religion required; and their *effect* never was to suspend his communion with his Father, to make him pause in his laborious beneficence, or recoil from those sufferings which he was to undergo for our salvation.

I know not whether it is necessary for me here to remark, that, in considering these sufferings of our Saviour, we must always remember that they were felt solely by his human nature. The divine nature, possessed of immutable happiness and infinite joy, was incapable of sorrow. The two natures were united in the Redeemer, without being confounded or mingled together; and in all his sufferings the divinity did not exert itself, but left the humanity alone to sustain them. Thus, while the union with the divinity gave an infinite value and dignity to his sufferings, it did not interpose to diminish their severity.

Under this trouble of spirit, Jesus has recourse to prayer. It is the duty which, by his apostle, he has enjoined upon his disciples. "Is any afflicted? let him pray." And where, in calamity, can we better flee than to our Father, and to that blessed Redeemer, who, upon the throne of glory, remembers his groans, and agonies, and conflicts upon earth?

Jesus, full of submission, cries, "*What shall I say?*" What petition shall I now offer to the Father who heareth me always? Shall I say, "*Father, save me from this hour?*" for thus, without doubt, this sentence should be read, with an interrogation; the question itself implying a strong negative. The Redeemer never wished for an exemption from death; he always had reprov'd his disciples when they

would have dissuaded him from it. He was "straitened" till the time arrived when his "baptism" of sufferings and of blood should "be accomplished." He longed for the period when he should eat the last passover with his disciples. If in the garden he prayed that "the cup might pass from him;" this cup was the overwhelming anguish which then weighed down his soul, from which he was delivered, and not the sacrifice of the cross. No wonder that he refuses to pray to be saved from the hour of suffering and death, since he adds, "*for this cause came I into the world.*" The eternal purposes of God, the covenant engagements of the Redeemer, the language of ancient prophecy, his own predictions, the redemption of the world, all made it necessary that he should submit to this death, and undergo these woes; and for this very end he had become incarnate. He therefore exclaims, "*Father, glorify thy name.*" 'I fully and freely resign myself to thine holy will. Display thy perfections, promote thine honour by me; and I will rejoice, whatever may be my sufferings.'

Pause a moment, and consider your Saviour thus looking forward, clearly discerning all that he must endure, fully knowing the burden of sin, and the agonies it deserved; yet consenting to bear the imputation of the one, and the sufferings of the other; never recoiling till he could cry with the voice of triumph, "It is finished!" while he bows his head in death, and consummates the redemption of the world. Surely, if we are not dead to every generous feeling, our hearts must be affected by that love which urged him so willingly to endure the sufferings for us, so cheerfully to open his own heart for the reception of that sword of divine justice which was directed against us. It is true that he was violently slain by

wicked men; but from their power, how easily, had he chosen, could he have rescued himself! He who, by the majesty of his looks, and the authority of his words, cast to the ground those who came to apprehend him, could easily have delivered himself. While Judas betrayed him through covetousness, and Pilate condemned him through a worldly policy, and the Jews crucified him through rage, he gave himself only through love to man, and to display the glory of God. They intended only his death; but he, his death as a sacrifice, and was the sole offerer as it respected God, or benefited us.

His voluntary submission had scarcely been expressed before a loud and majestic "*voice from heaven*" proclaimed, "*I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.*" Thrice, by such a voice, was the testimony of the Father given to Jesus. His baptism was his solemn inauguration into his priestly office. As under the old dispensation, those who were his types were set apart by the application of water and the holy anointing oil, so Jesus was designated as the *High Priest* of our profession by water and the effusion of that Holy Spirit whom the oil typified. On this occasion, the voice from heaven cried, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." One great design of the transfiguration was to exhibit Jesus as the sole *Prophet* of his church. Moses and Elias appear, therefore, for a time; but they depart; and when the Saviour is left alone, the voice from heaven, that re-echoes on the top of the mountain, points him out as the only Lawgiver. "This is my beloved Son; *hear ye him.*" And now that he makes his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and is hailed as the Son of David, the *King Messiah*, this testimony is repeated; that thus, in the three

great mediatorial offices, Jesus might have the explicit attestation of his Father.

And how exalted is this testimony to the sublimity of the Redeemer's character, and the benefits of his mediatorial work: "*I have glorified my name.*" In the incarnation of Immanuel, the wisdom and the faithfulness, and the love of God, had already been illustriously displayed. By his doctrine and instructions the divine perfections had been more fully revealed to the world than they ever had been before. The sublime and spotless holiness of his life was a visible image of the purity of his eternal Father. And his miracles were not only a proof of his mission, but an evidence of the might of God, of the perfect subjection of all the powers of nature to its Author, and of the ease with which he could reward his friends, or punish his enemies.

Yes, in these and in other modes the honour of the divine name had been promoted by the Redeemer. But the voice from heaven added, "*I will glorify it again,*" more remarkably by thy death and the great effects of thy sacrifice. And has not this been fully verified? Had we time to display the divine glory, as manifested in the cross, the resurrection, the ascension of Jesus; in the gift of the Holy Spirit; in the conversion of the Gentiles; you would instantly acknowledge that this declaration has been accomplished. But on these and other points we cannot dilate, but must leave them principally for your own meditation. Think only for a moment of the former state of the greater part of the world, of those nations that are now most civilized? What were their fathers? blind idolaters, without any true notion of God or of futurity; with cruel, absurd, or abominable rites of worship. What has



enlightened and reformed them? What has shown them the true character of the All-perfect; the acceptable mode of worshipping him, and the mode of reconciliation to him? What but the death of Jesus, and the consequent bestowal of that Spirit, who gave energy and success to the addresses of the apostles, and who inspired their writings? Think of the myriads upon myriads that have been plucked from ruin, that are now shining with light and burning with love before the throne of God, and that display the divine perfections inconceivably more than can all the material frame of nature, with all its pomp and majesty. Whence came it that these were thus exalted? Their own song affords the answer: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever." Look at the believers who are still upon earth: who are praising and blessing God, celebrating his perfections, and advancing to his heaven. How came they to be the trophies of divine grace, the everlasting monuments of infinite love; beings who through eternity shall glorify the name of God? because Jesus died; and they obtained redemption through his blood, and sanctification by his Spirit. Look forward to that day which is hastening on: that day which our faith anticipates, and our hope longs for, when the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of God; when every heart shall beat high with love to the Lord; when songs of salvation shall float in every breeze; when this world, so long oppressed with sorrow and with sin, shall resemble heaven in happiness and purity. Whence comes it, that this revenue of praise and glory shall be given to the Most High? because Jesus died; and because the promises made of him and to him, in the everlasting

covenant, and in the predictions of the prophets, must be accomplished. After such views, turn back and stand for a moment at the foot of the cross. Look upwards, and see how there especially the name of God is glorified. The divine perfections are there displayed *in a degree infinitely greater* than they are elsewhere manifested. You admire the *goodness*, which shines in nature and providence; which created, supports, and surrounds you with blessings: but what is this to that love which induced the Father to give the Son of his bosom to undergo such agonies for your salvation? You shudder at that *justice* and *holiness* which are announced in the scriptures, which are heard in the thunders and glitter in the lightnings on Sinai, and which blaze in the flames of hell; but they are more manifested in the tremendous sacrifice of Immanuel. The infinite holiness of God, his implacable hatred of sin, and the impossibility that it should escape punishment, never were so fully attested as when God spared not his own Son, but was pleased to "bruise him and put him to grief," when he appeared in the stead of sinners. Review the other attributes of God, and you will see them shining with equal lustre upon Calvary. It is there that those perfections, which appeared irreconcilable, *beautifully and completely harmonize*. Holiness is exalted, while grace triumphs. The rights of the divine government are unimpaired, while the sinner is saved. "Righteousness and peace meet together, mercy and truth embrace each other." Yes! it is to the cross that believers go, to study the perfections of the God whom they adore, and to increase the fervour of their love to him. It is from the contemplation of it, that the hallelujahs of the redeemed in heaven are uttered

with new warmth and transport. And the angels who so long have dwelt in the immediate presence of God, discern in it new wonders, and look from the throne of the Eternal to Calvary, and admire, bless, and adore. All holy intelligences acknowledge that there God has indeed glorified his name.

1. *Careless and impenitent man, this subject should alarm thee!* The woes which Jesus endured, were suffered for the guilty: but if thou ungratefully neglect him, if thou refuse penitently and believingly to draw near to him, thou shalt experience the same agonies which were felt by this victim of love, shalt experience them for ever. Refuse the gospel method of salvation, and thou sacrilegiously attemptest to rob God of his glory manifested in it. But wilt thou succeed? Ah, no! God will be glorified by thee for the gift of his Son, or upon thee for thy neglect of him. "Give glory then in time to the Lord thy God, before thy feet stumble on the dark mountains" of horror and despair.

2. Believer, in the anguish of Jesus, see *the foundation of thy joy*. He suffered, that thou mightest triumph. In all thy griefs remember him, who to his infinite grace as God adds that sympathy derived from a fellow-feeling of our infirmities; and go "boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in every time of need." Triumph in the stability of thy hopes. God has inseparably united his own glory with the salvation of the believer. Instead of being opposed to thy happiness, he reckons it his honour. Blessed plan of salvation, which is at once so safe for man, so glorious to God!

3. Communicants, approach the holy table. Contemplate the glories of God in the crucified Saviour. Retrace the mercy of your Redeemer. Behold in

him “ the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth ;” and, “ beholding in his face the glory of God, may we be changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of our God.”

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## SERMON LVI.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XXIII.



THE AGONY OF JESUS.

LUKE xxii. 44.

*Being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly ; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

My brethren ; the external sufferings of your Saviour have often been described to you with energy and force ; the cross has been reared in your presence, and you have beheld it red with the blood of your Redeemer : the scourge, the thorns, the nails, and the spear, which lacerated the body of the holy Jesus, have been held up to your view. The remembrance of these sorrows has affected your hearts, and drawn tears from your eyes. We come to you today to fix your thoughts on another part of your Sa-

viour's sufferings; we mean not to elevate the cross in the midst of you, and show your Redeemer extended upon it: we wish not to engage your natural sympathy, by directing your minds to his wounds and his blood, and by painting to you the cruelty of his executioners. We are to consider the more terrible griefs of his soul; we are to present him suffering, not under the iniquitous sentence of Pilate, but under the awful condemnation of God, who wounds him as our pledge and surety; stricken, not by the ruthless soldiery, but by his heavenly Father. O man, these are subjects which are calculated equally to astonish and console! Let us meditate on them with the most vigorous attention. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Jesus, having instituted the holy sacrament, having given to his disciples the most tender consolations against their approaching sorrows, and having offered in their behalf to his Father, a most affectionate and ardent prayer, departs with them from Jerusalem, and crosses the brook Cedron, which flowed at the edge of the city. Over this brook David formerly passed with a small number of faithful followers, when he fled from Jerusalem to avoid the treachery and violence of the rebellious Absalom: the greater son of David now crosses it, not to flee from, but to meet his perfidious betrayer. Beyond this stream, about a mile's distance from the city, was the mount of Olives, at the foot of which was the village of Gethsemane: in this village was a garden, known by Judas to be often visited by the Saviour, and consecrated by his prayers: thither he had often retired after the toils of the day, to hold communion with his Father; thither he now goes to experience woes inconceivable.

Having arrived at Gethsemane, he takes with him Peter, and James, and John, and retires with them to the hallowed garden. It was necessary that believers should know what Christ had undergone for their salvation; and as this was one of the principal scenes of his sufferings, it was therefore needful that he should have witnesses of it. But why were these particular disciples chosen from the rest, for this office? Two reasons may be assigned:

1. It appears from the whole evangelical history, that these three were peculiarly beloved by our Lord, in evidence of which he bestowed upon them only, new and characteristic names; they were, as one of the Fathers expresses it, "the elect among the elect." Christ, therefore, by choosing them to behold and participate in his sufferings, at once gave a strong proof of his confidence and affection, and has taught his disciples in every age this useful lesson: that he leads not his favourites to heaven, by a path strewn with flowers, and that a communion in his griefs should be so far from distressing us, that we should consider it as a testimony of his affection.

2. But a second reason of the selection of these three disciples to be witnesses of his agony was, because they were better prepared than the others to behold this deep humiliation of their Lord, since they only had witnessed his transfiguration. It was most proper that those who had beheld Jesus upon Tabor, in the majesty of his divine nature, encircled with glory, adored by Moses and Elias, should behold him in the depression of his human nature, distressed, and contemplating only objects of terror and dismay. That they who had heard the illustrious testimony of God, "This is my beloved Son," should also hear the complaints and groans that the Saviour

pours out to his Father: that they who had seen his face luminous as the sun, should also behold it cast down with grief, and covered with a bloody sweat. Had this last scene been presented to any who had not been fortified by the first, they could scarcely have preserved their faith unshaken; they could scarcely have avoided doubting whether this were indeed the expected Messiah, whether this were indeed the object of God's paternal love. There was then a peculiar propriety in the selection of these three persons: and happy alike were ye, favoured disciples, when ye saw the glory of the Lord Jesus upon Tabor, and his charity for mankind in Gethsemane; when ye saw there what he was in himself, and here what he became for us; when ye witnessed there the love that the heavenly Father bears to his eternal Son, and here the love which this Son bears to his followers.

The Saviour then having left the greater part of his disciples at the entrance of the garden, began to open his heart to Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee, and to inform them of the secret grief with which his soul was penetrated. In speaking of this grief and sadness, the Evangelists use terms incomparably stronger than when they describe any other part of the sufferings of the Redeemer. The expressions in the original have an energy which is by no means conveyed in our translation, and signify the overwhelming of Christ, by the utmost amazement, dejection, and anguish. But how is it conceivable, that the soul of one perfectly pure and innocent, should be thus agitated and tortured? that the constancy of Jesus, our only strength and support, should appear to fail? that he who is inseparably united to the source of joy and blessedness, should be sorrow-

ful and distressed? It is true, that as he had assumed a human body, sensible to pain, it might be wounded, and its wounds might affect the mind: but here are no chains which bind him, no executioners who scourge him, no soldiers who insult him, no cross to which he is nailed. He is in a beautiful garden, in a delightful solitude, attended only by his beloved disciples, who are expressing their assurances of fidelity and constancy. Here appears nothing that could interrupt the calm of his mind, nothing but what would afford him the serenest pleasure. It is true again, that the soul may sometimes be convulsed without the intervention of bodily pain; that the passions may shake it and become internal executioners; that the sense of guilt, that the remorse of conscience, may excite within the breast an inward hell. But in Christ the passions were always submissive to reason and piety; his soul was never delivered as a prey to their fury; he never experienced an emotion that was excessive. But in Christ, conscience could find nothing to condemn; his conduct was all pure, and holy, and beneficent; his past actions, when recollected, would afford him peace and joy, instead of filling him with sorrow and dismay. It is true, finally, that Jesus perfectly knows, that he is shortly to expire. But death is to terminate all his sorrows, and to restore him to that glory which he had with the Father before the world began. It never possessed any terrors for him. Upheld by the unshaken constancy and firmness of his soul, and by an inviolable trust in his Father, he had often contemplated with pleasure the narrow interval between himself and the cross, and been straitened until his baptism of blood was accomplished. When he was under the actual pressure of those sufferings



which preceded his death, he was composed and firm: we find not that he made one complaint of the cruelty of his foes; or uttered one groan, when his hands and feet were nailed to the engine of torture; or shed one tear when the scourges tore his flesh, when the iron entered into his soul, when the thorns wounded his sacred temples. Is it probable that the bare prospect of death thus convulsed him, who with such firmness met it when clothed in all its terrors? What is then that invisible arm that smites him? What is the cause of that astonishing grief, which calls down an angel from heaven to strengthen him, the Creator of angels; which urges those strong cries and tears, and forces from his agonized frame that dreadful sweat of blood?

There are several causes,\* which, in their conjoined influence, were fully sufficient to produce this wonderful event; we will explain them after we have observed, in order to prevent erroneous ideas, that these sufferings were felt only by the human nature of Christ; the divine nature, possessed of infinite and immutable felicity, cannot possibly be affected by any sorrow or pain. In Christ, the two natures were perfectly united without being confounded or mingled together; and in all his sufferings, the divinity did not exert itself, or was operative only in communicating strength to the humanity, to bear what would have been utterly insupportable to any mere man. Its influence on the body was suspended, whilst he remained three days lifeless; its influence on the soul is now suspended in Gethsemane.

1. And this intermission of the Divine Presence, this withdrawal of the human nature from the ineffa-

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\* See an excellent discourse on the causes of the Agony, by Bishop Browne, from which I have borrowed several thoughts in this sermon.

ble bliss and consolation of his Godhead, we make the first cause of the agony of the Saviour. It was proper that he should undergo this, since it constituted one part of the punishment denounced against the sinner, which punishment was here borne by him. From the weakness of our reason, and the feebleness of our powers, we cannot tell the precise manner of this suspension and intermission of the divine presence, nor how it could take place in consistence with the intimate and inseparable union of the divine and human natures. This, with many other mysteries of grace, as well as of nature, will not be perfectly comprehended by us, till we arrive at the kingdom of light. But, though we cannot explain it, a few considerations will show that it produced misery unutterable. The presence thus withdrawn from our Saviour, is the source of all true joy, the fountain of all real consolation. It is this, which alone constitutes heaven; it is this which fills angels with ecstasy, and archangels with rapture; and there is not one of those exalted beings who does not view a single moment's intermission of it with greater dread, than we do the pangs of death, the disruption of the soul from the body. Of this cheering presence, the only fountain of real happiness, Christ was now deprived. This separation from the presence of God, is one of the chief sources of the misery of the accursed. "Depart from me," is the terrible sentence pronounced upon the inhabitants of the regions of wo. Though Christ experienced none of that despair which corrodes the soul of these wretched beings, but still preserved his faith and confidence, yet, as far as this sentence relates to separation from God, the effect of it was felt by him. Oh! then, how far beyond imagination must his anguish have been!

Believers, recur for a moment to your own sensations. Have any periods of your life been half so wretched as those in which the light of God's countenance was eclipsed, and the emanations of his love interrupted? Have the keenest outward sorrows ever given you pains comparable to those felt by you, when the presence of God was veiled from your eyes? After thinking of yourselves, consider those who have made more eminent advances in the divine life, and you will find, that in exact proportion to their holiness, is their anguish in losing these spiritual delights, and their fervency in crying out, "Hide not thy face from me, O Lord, for I am troubled!" Think then, that if men, weak and but partially sanctified, infinitely unable to comprehend the full value of this blessing, having enjoyed it but for a short time, and in a small degree, inclined from their natural dispositions to seek for delights from other sources; if these were so deeply afflicted at the intermission of the Divine Presence, what must Jesus have felt? Jesus, whose holiness was consummate, and without spot: Jesus, who knew how properly to estimate this blessing, and who made of it his only joy: Jesus, who, as the uncreated Word, had through eternity possessed all the glories of the Godhead, and enjoyed the cheering light of his Father's countenance, and who, even in his human nature, had received the Spirit without measure, and had dwelling in him the fulness of divinity, but who now finds himself emptied at once of what he had for ever enjoyed, divested of the ineffable bliss resulting from the full communications of the felicity of the infinitely blessed God. Oh! in vain do the thoughts labour to comprehend the immensity of that anguish springing from such a loss! None but God can conceive

the happiness of God; and none but he who knows it, can tell the wo arising from the loss of it. My brethren, of what must our hearts be made, if they can remain insensible, whilst considering that love passing knowledge, which for our sakes submitted to agonies such as these? Jesus, compassionate Saviour! when I think of thine outward woes, and bodily pains; groans, sighs, tears are extorted from me; but as soon as I meditate on these, the ineffable and mysterious agonies of thy soul, I rise above outward sorrow, and filled with veneration and awe, I wonder, I adore, I am overwhelmed with the consideration of these unfathomable sufferings.

2. But a second cause of this agony was, the burden of those sins under which, as Saviour, he laboured. On him was laid the iniquity of us all: he was to become the propitiation for the transgressions of the whole world. Consider but a moment, and you will see how this must have weighed down his holy soul. He perfectly knew the infinite guilt and odiousness of that sin, to atone for which he was to be offered in sacrifice. We view it with comparative indifference, because we have such inadequate ideas of its nature: but he clearly saw how loathsome it is in the sight of God, how opposed to his character and law, how base an ingratitude to our heavenly Father, how polluting to our own souls. He beheld the infinite number of those sins for which he was to expiate: each one of them with all its aggravations was present to his view. With what horror and detestation must the contemplation of this vast heap of guilt have filled his holy soul! and how severe must have been the aspect of that infinite justice, how terrible its strokes, which he now was to satisfy to the uttermost. Now it was that "God

made him to be sin for us that knew no sin;" now it was that "the arrows of the Almighty were within him, and the terrors of the Lord set in array against him;" now it was that "it pleased the Lord to bruise him, to put him to grief, and to make his soul an offering for sin;" now it was that the wrath of God flamed against him, standing in our stead, with as much violence as though it had exerted itself in one act against the wickedness of all mankind. It is true, that during all this time he was most dear to God, and that the Father beheld him with peculiar affection, whilst he was laying down his life for the glory of God and the salvation of man. Nevertheless it is certain that the fierce anger of God was exercised upon him. Any apparent inconsistency in these assertions, results from our ignorance of the divine attributes: we are apt to suppose that these attributes resemble human affections, and then to imagine contradictions and inconsistencies. The truth is, we know not what anger is in God; we have no idea whatever of the manner in which Christ bore it; but we know that he did bear it, although he was the object of the Father's tenderest love. When we consider these circumstances, can we wonder at his agony? He experienced not merely the reproaches, the contumelies, the barbarities of men, but as our Redeemer and Surety, bearing the load of our guilt, he felt the pressure of Almighty vengeance; he felt the severity of that anger before which the mountains tremble, and the earth vanishes away; he received in his own bosom all the violence of that indignation which the united constancy of men, and force of angels could not have sustained; he was encircled by those fires which would instantly have consumed any but a divine victim. Ah! could

the Saviour fail to be agonized, when he here bent under this wrath in the garden, and anticipated its infliction on the cross? The mere conception of these woes, which outweighed the sins of the whole world, would be sufficient to overwhelm us: could we but have a clear prospect of them, our souls would be filled with astonishment and horror, the consideration of the mighty weight of anguish would make us, like our Saviour, sweat drops of blood; our very frames must be dissolved: what mortal, or what angel then, can tell the anguish arising from its endurance?

3. We may find a third cause for this grief in the reflections made by Christ, that millions would obstinately neglect his sufferings, and receive no benefit from them. He saw that although that death towards which he was advancing, would be a sufficient atonement for the sins of the world, yet, nevertheless, his followers would be few. Looking down through successive ages, he beheld the much-beloved Jerusalem, to which the gospel of salvation had in vain been offered, filling up the measure of its crimes, reduced to ruin by the Roman armies, and its faithless inhabitants consigned to everlasting wo. He beheld those numbers who in every age neglect his grace; those miserable men who in our days trample upon the blood of atonement, despise his full and perfect sacrifice, and aim their impotent attempts against his holy faith. He beheld the countless multitude of open sinners "glorying in their shame;" of lukewarm professors "having the form of godliness without the power." And now think what sensations would be excited in the breast of the Redeemer, by such a view. His concern for the salvation of mankind was boundless; his compassion

for our miseries, most tender; his wish to rescue us from sin and perdition, most strong. Could he, whose love passes knowledge, whose compassion for every one of us, was infinitely greater than we can have for ourselves; could he, who more than once wept over perishing Jerusalem; he, whose heart melted with pity even for his crucifiers, and who, in the midst of his tortures, poured out his prayers to heaven in their behalf; could he view the eternal perdition of so many millions without sorrow unutterable? He alone knew the full extent of this perdition; to him *damnation* was not a word of empty sound; he fully comprehended the agonies of a soul ever gnawed by that worm which dieth not, ever rolling in those flames which are not quenched, ever sinking deeper and deeper in wretchedness and despair. Add to this, that as the Saviour was possessed of infinite knowledge, he beheld these scenes as actually present. He beheld all these transgressors already standing at his bar, already condemned, already sinking in the devouring flames, already exposed, naked and unarmed, to the lashes of an enraged conscience; already weighed down by the terrible indignation of the Lord God Almighty. What anguish must this contemplation have excited in the Saviour, especially when he considered that these were the last tears he was to pay to the sad destiny of these unhappy men, since he was now going to re-assume the throne of glory, on which no tears are shed, where no sorrow could invade his heart.

4. But the last cause of the agony, was the injections and assaults of evil spirits. This is intimated in several parts of the gospel. After the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, Satan is said to have departed from him "for a season;" and in the evan-

gical history we meet with no period for his return, more probable than this. Christ, immediately before entering into the garden, tells his disciples, "The prince of the world cometh;" and when apprehended by the Jews, says to them, "This is your hour and the power of darkness." These texts seem clearly to imply that Christ had now to contend with the band of apostate spirits. Foreseeing, perhaps, that his death was to be the expiation of the sins of the world, and that through its merits mankind were to be put in possession of the place which they once held in heaven, they may have endeavoured to terrify him from it, or to render it involuntary and constrained, and therefore useless. At any rate, they would rejoice to glut their vengeance upon him who was expelling them from the bodies, and shaking their dominion in the souls of men. Ah! how keen must have been their attacks when, irritated by shameful defeats in all their previous assaults, urged on by diabolical malice, having free access to the soul of the Redeemer, without the intervention of bodily organs, and dreadfully powerful from their subtlety and long experience in wickedness, they poured in upon him a flood of temptations, and assailed him with evil and afflictive suggestions.

Such were the adequate causes of that dreadful agony which so agitated the mind of the Redeemer, and so afflicted his body, that blood gushed from every pore. Human capacities cannot conceive the extent and bitterness of these sufferings; human language cannot describe them: bowing under them, he prostrated himself upon the ground, and poured forth his fervent petitions to Almighty God, saying, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou



wilt." He does not here pray for a deliverance from the death of the cross, as some have supposed: at the prospect of this he was never daunted; he knew that the prophecies and decrees of God made it irreversibly necessary; he ever rebuked with severity his disciples, when they would dissuade him from it; and, what is conclusive, the apostle Paul, (Heb. vi. 7.) speaking evidently of these very supplications, says, "he was heard in that he feared;" an assertion that would plainly be untrue, if he prayed for a deliverance from death. The affliction which the Saviour desired to be removed (and which by a common figure he denominated a *cup*,) was that distress and agony with which he was then assailed; and it was removed, for he immediately became calm, and placid, and composed.

From the several circumstances of the agony thus considered, we derive many instructions and valuable lessons.

1. We learn from the example of our Saviour, what conduct becomes a Christian when under affliction and distress. The Christian religion requires no stoical insensibility, no sullen apathy, no haughty contempt of the evils of life. It permits us, like our Divine Master in this event of his life, to feel and lament the infelicities of our situation; to deprecate those calamities which we see approaching; yet notwithstanding it thus condescends to the frailty of our nature, it nevertheless requires that when these afflictive judgments come, we should be perfectly submissive to the dispensations of God; that even whilst our tears flow, we should acquiesce in his disposal; that the voice of nature exclaiming. "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from

me," should be mingled with the accents of resignation, "Not my will, but thine be done."

2. We learn from this subject how great is the love of God and the Redeemer for the children of men. "Now I know that thou lovest me," said God to Abraham, when he prepared to sacrifice to him his son. And shall not we, heavenly Father, acknowledge thy love, when for our salvation thou givest thine eternal Son to such infinite tortures? "Behold how he loved him," was the exclamation of the Jews when they beheld Jesus weeping over the tomb of Lazarus; in how much stronger a manner does he attest his charity in Gethsemane, where he sheds tears of blood. Courage then, Christian soul! confident of the affection of thy Redeemer, what needest thou dread? By his agony he has taken from you all cause of sorrow; his griefs will fill you with joy, his fears with assurance. He has suffered for you, who shall condemn you? As he is able, so he proves himself to be willing to dispense to you every thing that shall conduce to your greatest happiness and final salvation. He will "make all things work together for your good:" his agony attests that his love to you is too great to deny you any *real* blessing. Courage, Christian soul! the recollection of the agony of Jesus will support you amidst all your distresses; though you are poor, sick, persecuted, surrounded by enemies, the remembrance of Jesus in the garden will cheer you, and you will rejoice that you are "counted worthy to suffer with him," that you "may also be glorified together." Courage, Christian soul! this is a source of joy which even the king of terrors cannot wrest from you. In the last struggle of dissolving nature, when the vanishing world shall be unable to afford

you support, you shall fix your closing eyes upon the agonized Saviour expiating for your offences, the accusations of conscience shall be silenced; all your afflictions shall cease, and you shall pass from the contemplation of the tortured Jesus, to the arms of Jesus reigning and triumphing in glory.

3. Finally: what can more strongly illustrate at the same time the infinite odiousness of sin, and the infinite justice of God, than this view of Jesus in Gethsemane? You know that of himself he is essential holiness; that clothed in his divine glories he was the object of adoration, and the source of felicity to all the blest in heaven; that whilst he tabernacled upon earth, he knew sin only to combat and destroy it; that to him that illustrious testimony was given, which re-echoed along the banks of Jordan and resounded on the top of Tabor, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" yet no sooner did he undertake "to bear the sins of man in his own body," than the sword of almighty justice was drawn against even him, and was dyed with his heart's blood. My brethren, if God spared not his own Son, what will be our condemnation if we continue impenitent? If we remain without an interest in the Saviour, what asylum, what city of refuge, can we find to shelter us against that justice which is so powerful, that it crushes a God-man; so holy, that it punishes in him even imputed sins; so severe, that nothing but his blood and his death could appease it; so inflexible, that it regarded not the dignity even of the Redeemer? These are dreadful thoughts; stifle them not, I beseech you, by the cares and delights of the world; you may lead yourselves to forget them now; but they will return with awful force upon your bed of death. At this last hour, when

every thing will abandon you, when all human succours shall become useless to you, when those delusive blessings which you enjoyed upon earth shall be torn from you, then the sufferings of Christ, which might have been your resource, your refuge, your strength, shall fill you with the most lively fears and dismay. You will shudder when you consider this Saviour sacrificed by the same justice which will then cite you to its tribunal; notwithstanding all the efficacy of a divine blood, it will give no hope to you: and when your soul, torn at last from your body, shall fall defenceless and polluted before the throne of the holy God, what, ah! what will then be your destiny? what will be the inflictions of that justice which here manifested its power and severity by wounding the Saviour? of that justice which will consider the agonies of Christ as aggravating your guilt, and impressing more deeply on your soul the seal of eternal reprobation?

## SERMON LVII.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XXIV.



WOMEN FOLLOWING HIM TO CALVARY.

LUKE xviii. 27.

*And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, who also bewailed and lamented him.*

IT is of the blessed Saviour that the Evangelist is here speaking. With a calmness and serenity worthy of the Son of God, with a resolution fixed as the eternal purposes of heaven, the Redeemer of the world was now in silence advancing to Calvary in the midst of the immense crowd assembled to witness his death. Reproaches, execrations, and curses, on all sides met his ears. The artifices of the scribes and pharisees had excited the people to the greatest fury against him. They were filled with a malignant joy at his sufferings: and, not satisfied with his exhaustion from his agony in the garden, from the insults and cruelties heaped upon him in the hall of Caiaphas, in the court of Herod, and at the bar of Pilate, they panted to behold him extended upon the engine of torture.

In the midst of this sanguinary and ferocious crowd, one group is found which "is afflicted in all the afflictions of Jesus." It consists of some pious women, who, full of admiration for his excellences, and of gratitude for his benefits, of which they had been the partakers and the witnesses, follow this innocent victim to the altar, and offer him all they can, the tribute of their affections and their tears. St. Luke does not mention their names; but his silence is in part supplied by St. Matthew, who informs us, that among them were Mary Magdalene; Mary, the mother of James and Joses; and the wife of Zebedec, to whom John and Mark give the name of Salome; all three worthy to be distinctly mentioned, as constituting part of this pious company. Let us fix our eyes upon this interesting group. These females give the most important instructions to all Christians, and especially to their own sex, of which they are at once the ornament and the model. They teach us that it is our duty to follow Jesus with *faith*, with *love*, and with *courage*.

1. A *belief* in Jesus as the "sent of God," a *faith* in him as the long-expected Messiah, induced these pious women to attend him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and now caused them to trace his bloody footsteps upon Calvary. This faith is efficacious and permanent: incapable of being destroyed by those melancholy scenes passing before them, which shock the confidence of so many who once "trusted in Jesus, that it was he who would redeem Israel." It is thus permanent, because it is enlightened, being founded not on a blind prejudice or a chimerical hope, but on the solid instructions of the Saviour, and an experience of his grace and power. "Seated at the feet of Jesus," they had listened attentively

to his doctrines, had seen their glory and excellence, had felt their transforming influence. They therefore desire to follow him to the cross, that they may lose none of his lessons; that their piety may be animated, their hopes fortified, their faith confirmed. They behold, it is true, Jesus betrayed, accused of blasphemy and sedition, condemned to the most infamous punishment, and led to the cross amidst the maledictions of the priests, the scoffs of the great, and the reproaches of the people. But all this is insufficient to shake their faith, for they are able to look beyond this exterior of humiliation and suffering to that majesty, that "brightness of the Father's glory," which is obscured for a little time, that it may re-appear with greater lustre. Instructed in the scriptures by him who is the subject and the end of them, they knew that "Christ was to suffer these things, and *thus* to enter into his glory." They see in these sufferings the fulfilment of those prophecies which predicted them, and in his death that perfect sacrifice of which all those under the law were but types and shadows. They have "known and believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God;" and this faith, founded on a deep and enlightened conviction, nothing can tear from them.

Do you not desire, my brethren, a faith like this, which can uphold you under the most mysterious aspect of Providence, which will make you cleave to Jesus, and follow him through evil as well as good report? Like Mary, "seat yourselves at the feet of Christ," that you may learn and love the truth, and then you will persevere in it.

2. These holy women teach us to follow Jesus with *love*. Ah! with what attachment to him were

they not animated ! If the least susceptible heart is touched and moved at merely reading the life and doctrine of the Saviour, whose precepts and whose conduct displayed only charity and love, judge what impression Jesus Christ himself, speaking and acting, must have made upon these pious females. A Master who opens his mouth only to pronounce words of peace, of hope, of consolation ; who “ went about doing good ;” who presents truth only that he may lead his hearers to happiness : if there be a spark of feeling in the heart, must not such an object excite it to a flame that nothing can quench ? Such was the effect produced upon these holy women. That lively sensibility with which this sex is endowed, was purified, was ennobled, was augmented, while directed entirely towards religion and its Author, and produced a complete and unalterable devotedness of soul. Touched with the excellence of his heavenly doctrine, with its inseparable connexion with our dearest interests, with the infinite blessings resulting from an intercourse with the Saviour, they open to him their hearts, and with them all the resources which the state of humiliation that he condescended to assume, rendered necessary. He is *poor*, and they supply his wants ; hungry, and they give him to eat ; thirsty, and they give him drink ; he has not where to lay his head, and their houses are opened to him ; they leave Galilee, their country, to “ minister unto him :” and, having thus displayed towards him during life those attentions which an active and warm sensibility inspires, they come to his cross to show their sympathy and their grief. Mary Magdalene, and you who divide with her the last duties of affection, you “ have loved much.” For this love you have been recompensed



by the Saviour; and in the perfection of this sentiment in the heavenly world, you now find your felicity!

3. These holy women display an exalted *courage* and *magnanimity*. Behold the apostles of Jesus Christ, the companions of his labours, the witnesses of his miracles and his virtues, and who, from the habitual and intimate commerce in which they lived with him, ought to have acquired the most inviolable devotedness and the most heroic courage: how far inferior are they to these pious females! They are terrified, they fly, and abandon Jesus. One single one dares to follow him, at a distance, to the house of Caiaphas; but it is only to deny him, to blush at being called his disciple! and this is the same one who had declared that he would follow him to prison and to death! What Peter promised, without fulfilling his promise, Mary and her companions executed! And yet, how many temptations had they to combat! how many obstacles to surmount more than the apostles! Besides the dangers that were common to them with all who showed themselves attached to Jesus Christ; besides the consequences that the flock might apprehend when the shepherd was so cruelly treated; besides this, how many obstacles were placed before them by the weakness and timidity of their sex, and by the maxims of the world! What *rashness!* to expose themselves thus to an unbridled soldiery and a furious populace! What *indecorum!* to display before a whole nation their attachment to a man condemned by the voice of the people, as well as by the sentence of the governor, and who is now about to terminate his life by an infamous death! What *fanaticism!* to divide the ignominy of the cross by the tears they would be

seen to shed; and to attach this ignominy to those connected with them! These would be specious reasonings; nay, they would be delicate and strong temptations to ordinary souls: but Mary and her companions are not ordinary souls. Animated by that faith which subdues the world, and by that love which casts out fear, they overcome all these obstacles, they brave all these dangers. They have too profoundly impressed upon their hearts that sublime lesson of their Master, to fear not them that can only kill the body, but who cannot kill the soul, not to prefer the reproach of Christ before all the blessings of earth; and these hearts, which were entirely devoted to their divine Master during his life, resolve to display their devotion to him till his last sigh, and at the foot of the cross, and thus show themselves faithful even unto death.

Christians, these models of faith, of love, of courage, interest you *all*; and in the number of those who hear me, there is not a single person who cannot, and who ought not, to draw from them both objects and motives of imitation. I wish, however, to excite in those of the same sex that salutary emulation, which the example of these holy women is so well calculated to inspire. The zeal which the Saviour employed for the instruction and salvation of this portion of our race; the care which the Evangelists have taken to transmit to us circumstances relative to this part of his ministry; his conversations with the Samaritan woman, with Magdalen, with the sisters of Lazarus, with many others, which have been preserved to us; these and similar considerations oblige us sometimes to direct our addresses to a class of our hearers, not only equally precious in the eyes of God, equally destined to im-

mortality, but whose influence on society is also so great. Let me then address myself to persons of that sex whom the Saviour chose to hear some of the last accents of his voice. Let me present them with some *general* considerations to imitate the touching example of these holy women, and, like them, to devote themselves to God; and to seek that degree of elevation to which religion conducts a soul that directs to it all its energy and sensibility.

1. Let me then urge you by *the superior advantages* you possess for the cultivation of piety. With how many temptations do men meet, from which you are exempted! In mingling with the world, a thousand snares are spread before them, to which you are strangers. Society has placed around you numberless mounds and barriers, which do not encompass them. And will you not improve these salutary restraints? Ought they not to have a tendency to prevent you from wandering from your God and Saviour?

Besides, the Creator has endowed you with greater warmth of feeling and sensibility of heart; qualities so favourable to the reception and cultivation of religious impressions. And can you then hear unmoved, of the love of your God, and the grace of your Redeemer? Can you waste all the tenderness of your hearts on earthly objects, and neglect infinite excellence and perfection? It has been eloquently and truly said, that "if Christianity were compelled to flee from the mansions of the great, the academies of philosophers, the halls of legislators, or the throng of busy men, we should find her last and purest retreat with woman at the fireside; her last altar would be the female heart; her last audience would be the children gathered round the knees of a mother; her last sacrifice, the

secret prayer escaping in silence from her lips, and heard perhaps only at the throne of God."

2. Let me urge you to follow Jesus, and devote yourselves to God, from the consideration that in doing so, you will be *imitating the example* of thousands and tens of thousands of your sex, whose piety caused them to be beloved and useful upon earth, and who now, surrounding the throne of God, will rejoice if you acquire their temper, and prepare to mingle in their society. This discourse has already presented to you examples drawn from the gospels. I may add to what I have said, that even the death of our Lord did not bound the expressions of the love of these pious women, since they came to the tomb to embalm his sacred body. Their piety was attested and rewarded by our Lord, when he made them the first witnesses of his resurrection, and, as one expresses it, "the apostles, even to the apostles." And if we descend from the apostolic age to those which immediately succeeded, how many thousand females could we show you, displaying the fervour of their devotion, by exulting on the rack and in the flames; and, notwithstanding the delicacy of their sex, and the timorousness of their nature, rising superior to all the cruelties which men or devils could invent! And in no single period which has intervened between those primitive times and the present, have there been wanting numberless bright examples, in every situation in life, of illustrious females who shone as lights in the world. These have now received their crown; they behold that Jesus whom they loved, and they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. But they still extend their sensibilities and their views to this world, and they rejoice at the conversion of every sinner. Think,

then, with what a crowd of witnesses you are surrounded. They invite you to be followers of them, as they have been followers of Christ, and to unite yourselves with those among us (and, blessed be God, there are such) who live as though they must live for ever; that at last you may all join in one common choir, and through eternity swell the hymn of praise to the blessed Saviour.

3. Let me urge you to serious piety, from a consideration of *your obligations to Christ* and his religion. I do not here speak of those great obligations that are common to you and the other sex, an offer of forgiveness, of holiness, and of heaven. But I ask, what has given your sex that respectability which it possesses in Christian lands? Look round the world; you will in vain endeavour to find a single nation, unenlightened by the gospel, where women are not considered either as slaves of passion, or beasts of labour. It is the gospel alone, which, by teaching our common origin, our common redemption, and our common destination, has elevated you to the rank of rational beings, and fellow-heirs of eternity. Shall not the Saviour, then, and his gospel, to which you are so much indebted, have your gratitude and your love?

4. Let me urge you from a consideration of *your several relations in life*. Are you a *mother*? Look at your children, and let a regard to them urge you to serious piety. Your influence over them not only commences sooner than that of the father, but also endures for a longer time. There is no moment in which the son wishes to shake off the authority of a mother. The great majority of the pious unite in declaring that their first serious impressions were the result of maternal advice and instruction. Over your

daughters your influence is still more extensive than over your sons. You are their chief confidant, guide, and example. They will mould themselves upon your manners, and adopt your sentiments; and though you cannot renew their hearts, yet it depends more upon you than upon the whole world besides, whether hereafter they shall be blessings or curses to the community, and, in the unseen world, angels or fiends.

For their sakes, then, follow Jesus. Do not think it sufficient properly to instruct them, while your example does not concur with your instructions. No, no, miserable mother! you may give your offspring the most wise and pious instructions; but you have no reason to hope they will be blest while your behaviour proves that you scorn and despise them. In vain do you represent religion as the chief concern, if your conduct proves that the world, in some of its forms of fascination, is the object of your idolatry, they will probably imitate your example; they will be the heirs of sorrow, but the blood of their souls will be required at your hands.

Are you a *wife*? If your husband be pious, you continually wound his heart. Charms, and accomplishments, and external morality, and tender love to him, and the discharge of all domestic duties, cannot render him happy, while he knows that you are unprepared for the eternal world; and that if death should surprise you in your present condition, there must be an everlasting separation. Is he unholy? Your piety may save him. Touched by your example, and having blessings drawn upon him by your prayers, he may by you be plucked from everlasting ruin. Many a glorified spirit in heaven, many a happy believer upon earth, recalls, with adoring grati-

tude to God, the conduct of the pious wife that awakened his attention to religion, and led him to the Redeemer.

Are you a *daughter*? Ah! if your parents are indeed pious, you know not the agonies of their hearts, while they look upon you, whom nature and grace have taught them to love as themselves, and discern in you no evidences of real religion. Their closet witnesses their tears before God for you. In their familiar intercourse they express the sorrows of their heart for you. Turn unto the Lord, if you would give them joys greater than those that all your tenderness towards them has been able to bestow. And if, unhappily, they should be unholy, (wo, wo to such parents, who, neglecting their own souls, are ruining those of their children!) concur not with them in their conduct. Seek from God true religion. You may be the instruments of the spiritual and everlasting life of your parents. If they have hitherto neglected their Saviour, they may be affected by the example of your youthful piety, and you may be the means of plucking a careless father, or ungodly mother, from everlasting agonies.

Look in like manner over all the other relations you sustain, as friend, companion, acquaintance; and you will find them all present motives to piety.

From these considerations, then, as well as from the deeply solemn remembrance that they are sinful creatures, who need a pardon; accountable creatures, who must be judged; beings destined to immortal joy or misery; let all females follow Jesus, not with tears, (he no longer needs them,) but with gratitude, love, trust, and obedience.

## SERMON LVIII.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XXV.



HIS CRUCIFIXION.

LUKE xxiii. 33.

*And when they were come to the place that is called Calvary, there they crucified him.*

**PAUL**, the greatest of the apostles, determined to know nothing except Christ crucified; and even Moses and Elias, when they descended from the abodes of bliss and appeared on the mount of transfiguration, conversed of the decease which the Saviour was to accomplish at Jerusalem. Did each one of you then, my brethren, possess the wisdom and piety of the apostles, the extended capacities and the ardent zeal of glorified immortals, I could find no properer subject on which to address you, than the sufferings of Jesus; I could do nothing of more importance than to elevate the cross in your presence, and show you the mighty Redeemer extended upon it.

The sacrifice of his Saviour, is an object which the Christian should never suffer to escape from his remembrance: it should at all times be the theme of his meditations, for it is the source of all his comforts, the foundation of all his hopes, the most powerful in-



centive to the performance of his duties. His mind should therefore often be fixed upon Golgotha, and the doleful tragedy that was there exhibited. But especially on such an occasion as the present, when we have met together to commemorate the dying love of Jesus, nothing can be more proper, than to fix our thoughts and meditations on those final woes which at once most illustriously attested his love and consummated the sacrifice of our redemption. And this is the subject to which our attention is called, for the sole design and the whole division of this discourse, is

I. To review the final sufferings of the Saviour, and

II. To show you some of the duties, and present you with some of the consolations which result from the contemplation of these sufferings.

I. Then we are to review the final sufferings of the Saviour. We confine ourselves to these last scenes of wo, both because our time will not permit us to detail to you all the afflictions to which Jesus submitted during his continuance on earth, and also, because they of themselves are sufficient to awaken all our sympathies, and to kindle our holiest affections. No, believers, it is not necessary, in order to move you, to follow your suffering Saviour through all the stages of affliction; to paint to you his lowly birth; to present him to you calumniated and reviled as a plasphe<sup>m</sup>er, a sorcerer, a confederate with Beelzebub; submitting to tedious fastings and frequent hungerings; spending his days in incessant and wearisome labours; passing his wakeful nights in devotion, upon the bleak and solitary top of Olivet; yet lashed by the unfeeling tongue of obloquy, exempted not from the most malevolent reproach and most barbarous slander, requited for his acts of

mercy by treachery, ingratitude, and unkindness ; having his heart wrung by the prospect of the sins and approaching misery of the people, for whose benefit his most tender and indefatigable exertions were employed ; retiring to the garden of Gethsemane, sinking there under the strokes of Almighty God, who wounds him as our substitute and surety ; pouring out his strong cries and tears before his heavenly Father, whilst the ground on which he is stretched, smokes with the blood that rushes from every pore of his agonized frame, which trembles, oppressed by the anguish of his soul. No, Christians, it is not necessary to assemble in one mournful group, all these and ten thousand other woes, to which your Saviour submitted for you ; it is sufficient to contemplate the final passion, and by it we cannot fail to be affected, unless our hearts are harder than the rocks which rent asunder, colder than the earth which trembled, more insensible than the dead which started from their graves.

The passion of Christ comprehends his crucifixion and its preparatives : of these preparatives we select three only, on which we shall meditate but a short time ; his scourging, his bearing the cross, and his despoilment of his garments.

Pilate, through the whole of the examination of Jesus, attested his innocence, and declared that he found nothing in him worthy of death. But though his mind was thus convinced, yet he dared not act in conformity to its dictates. Conscious of the crimes that had blackened his administration, fearful of the Jews who threatened to accuse him to the Roman emperor if he released Jesus, yet unwilling to condemn a person of whose spotless innocence even he could not be insensible, he used several expedients

to save the life of Jesus, without offending his persecutors. One of these shameful expedients was, the delivery of Jesus to the soldiers, to be scourged by them, that thereby the fury of his enemies might be allayed, and their compassion excited. The brutal and inhuman soldiery, who had long been habituated to murder, and inured to blood, with joy execute the barbarous commission. What a spectacle! The sacred, the tender, the precious body of the Redeemer, is galled and torn by their merciless strokes; his blood, which lately bedewed the ground of Gethsemane, now flows in torrents on the pavement of Pilate's hall; "he is wounded for our transgressions; he is bruised for our iniquities;" that punishment which the Roman laws forbade to be exercised, except upon the vilest slaves, is endured, not merely by a citizen, not merely by a monarch, but by the Eternal Son of God! But surely, however brutal may have been the hearts of the soldiers, they were satisfied with this exercise of barbarity, they could carry no further their bitter cruelty: Ah no! it was not enough for them that the body of the Saviour was thus lacerated, they endeavour also to shake the serenity of his mind. They add, therefore, to these punishments the most keen scoffs and mockings. In the court of Caiaphas the Saviour had been derided as a false prophet; whilst smiting him with the palms of their hands they cried out, "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is it that smote thee?" In the court of Pilate he is derided as an ambitious madman, grasping at an empty sovereignty. They clothe him with a gorgeous robe, they insultingly place a reed in his hand instead of a sceptre, they form a crown of thorns, which they press upon his temples already throbbing with anguish; and having

thus equipped him with the ensigns of mock majesty, they jeeringly bow before him, and contemptuously exclaim, Hail, king of the Jews! Angels of mercy, why did ye not fly to his succour! Vengeance of my God, why didst thou slumber!

When the Saviour had submitted to all these griefs, Pilate again brought him before the Jews, hoping that they would be satisfied with the pains already inflicted upon him, and says unto them, "*Behold the man!*" 'See what I have caused to be done to him; behold him covered with reproaches, and with wounds, is he not sufficiently miserable? You thirsted for his blood, has not enough of it been shed to satisfy you?'

But this spectacle, instead of satiating, only enkindled more furiously the revenge of these barbarians, and they cry out with more violence, "Away with him, away with him! Crucify him, crucify him!" Then Pilate, the timid and criminal Pilate, fearing any longer to oppose their will, yields to their importunity; sacrifices to a worldly policy one whom he had uniformly acknowledged to be innocent; pronounces the sentence, "Let him be crucified," and delivers him into the hands of his enemies to be led to execution.

Rejoicing at this permission fully to glut their fury upon him, they immediately prepare for his crucifixion. The place of punishment was without the city, and the condemned person was obliged by the Roman law to carry thither the instrument of death. Behold then the Saviour of mankind bearing his cross on his own shoulders, yet smarting from the scourge. Behold the true Isaac bearing to the sacred mount, the wood on which he is to be offered as a sacrifice to God. He is surrounded by the

priests, the rulers of the synagogue, the pharisees, who pour forth upon him their invectives and curses. He who was worshipped by angels, who was adored by Moses and Elias upon Tabor; he, the Holy of Holies, is placed between two robbers, as though he were the leader of them. In this manner he departs from Jerusalem; but overcome by the severities that had already been inflicted upon him, his strength exhausted by labour and want of rest, he sinks under the weight of his cross. But though he thus feels the innocent infirmities of our nature, he murmurs not, he repines not; no impatient word escapes from his lips; no tears for his sad destiny appear in those eyes which had so often wept at the miseries of others. "He goes as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." His enemies, seeing that his strength was almost entirely exhausted, released him from the burden of the cross, and placed it on the shoulders of one Simon, a Cyrenian, whom they met returning from the fields. This conduct, however seemingly humane, was only the result of impatient rage and refined malice. Their fury was so great, that they could not bear delay, and they were fearful that he would expire before they arrived at the place of execution, and that they would thus lose the horrid pleasure of inflicting upon him those tortures which they had prepared for him. Daughters of Jerusalem! well might ye weep at such complicated wo! He had scattered his blessings on your ungrateful city; he had restored to your arms your husbands, your children, your friends, when consumed by sickness, or seized by death: you could not in return rescue him from that death to which he

voluntarily submitted; but you bestowed on him the tribute of your tears, the expression of your regrets.

Jesus, having undergone these previous sufferings, arrived at Calvary, where he was to offer himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world. Before they fastened him to the cross, they presented to him wine mingled with myrrh. This was always given to criminals before they suffered, in order to blunt the sense of pain, and produce stupefaction; but, says the Evangelist, Jesus "received it not:" (Mark xv. 23.) He was unappalled by the horrors of crucifixion; he had no need of any other supports than those of his God and his conscience; he wished to preserve his reason and feeling, that he might suffer the extremity of pain, and display, in an illustrious manner, all those virtues that he requires of his disciples in a season of trial.

Having rejected this offered lenitive, that he might meet death clothed in all his terrors, a new trial succeeds. The merciless executioners despoil him of his garments; they uncover his bleeding wounds, and expose his sacred body to the gaze of the populace. He who "decketh himself with light as with a garment;" he before whom, but a few days since, the people strewed their garments, that he might triumphantly enter into Jerusalem, now goes from this same Jerusalem, to be despoiled of his raiment before the inconstant and profane multitude. "His garments are taken from him, and for his vesture they cast lots."

The cross is now reared, his arms are stretched out upon it, and they strike the nails deep into those hands that had been employed only in works of beneficence and mercy; into those feet which bore him from city to city, "while he went about doing good,"

and blessing the nations. Whilst they are thus employed, whilst the sense of his ignominious sufferings is strongest, behold! he raises his eyes to heaven, he pours out his petitions to his Father! And for what does he petition? Does he not ask that the thunders of God should be sent forth, and blast his murderers to endless perdition? No, my brethren, he prays, he pleads for his murderers. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." They know not who it is that they thus revile and torture; forgive them, Father; my arms and my bosom are open to receive them. Let me be their advocate and intercessor with thee; let that blood which now gushes warm from my veins, shelter them from the strokes of thine offended justice. O what hearts must those have been, which could remain obdurate after this tender supplication of Jesus! But the hearts of the soldiers did remain obdurate; and the Maker of all things is suspended between heaven, which is his throne, and earth, which is his footstool, as though unworthy to occupy a place upon either.

We have naturally a high sense of shame, and in the most noble and generous minds this sense is the strongest. To be charged with the most heinous crimes; to be viewed with abhorrence and execration by our fellow-men; to suffer a punishment never inflicted by the Roman law upon a freeman, however guilty, but reserved for the vilest slave; to depart from earth, leaving our name and reputation covered with ignominy and dishonour; who can conceive the torments inflicted by such circumstances? Yet all this didst thou endure, merciful Saviour! Thy charity could not be satisfied by bearing all the misery

that could befall us, unless thou underwentest also all the ignominy which could overwhelm us.

This death then by its ignominy was naturally calculated to wound the mind of the Redeemer; by its painfulness it was calculated to convulse his frame. His whole body is suspended by his wounds, and the weight of his body continually widens those wounds, tears his nerves, rends the flesh, and causes the most exquisite pain. This pain is not transient; it continues for six long hours; life lingers and slowly departs; drop by drop it escapes him, whilst each moment he feels more than the pangs of an ordinary death.

He suffered then acutely: nevertheless no state can be supremely miserable when we have the pity and condolence of those who surround us. Behold then the crowd which surrounds the cross of the Redeemer, and listen to their expressions of sympathy and compassion. Sympathy! compassion! Alas, I hear nothing but blasphemies and imprecations; but an infernal rivalship in guilt: each is anxious to exceed others in cruelty, in indignity, in wickedness. *Here*, one cries, "He saved others, himself he cannot save!" *There*, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross!" *Here*, they exclaim, shaking their heads in scorn, "O thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it again in three days, display now the force of thy victorious arm!" *There*, that dreadful execration strikes his ears, "His blood be upon us, and our children!" Charity of my Saviour, dost thou still endure? Legions of angels, merciful Redeemer, wait only the first signal of thy voice to fly to thy succour. Though apparently weak and feeble, thou holdest the thunders in thine hand, wilt thou not discharge them?



Is not thy grace exhausted by the multiplied reproaches of this faithless nation? No, my brethren; though Jesus still possessed unlimited power; though he who had so often recovered others from death, could have saved himself from its attacks, yet it was ever his beautiful character that "his power was seated between his wisdom and mercy, and acted but by their counsel." To expiate for the sins of man, by submitting to a cruel death, he came into the world; he will not now relinquish his design through a vain and ostentatious desire to display his power, or through the unworthy impulse of revenge.

But perhaps this calmness in the midst of the reproaches of his enemies, is derived from the cheering light of his Father's countenance. Ah, no! for those divine communications of which he had made his only joy, are now intermitted. Bearing the punishment of our sins, the vials of divine wrath are poured out into his soul; and even his Father smites and afflicts him; so that he is constrained to cry out, in the extremity of his anguish, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" "The Jews are cruel and ungrateful, the devils malicious and opposed to holiness; I wonder not that these have assaulted me: my disciples themselves are weak and frail men; I am not surprised that they have abandoned me. But *thou*, my Father; thou who hast said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased:" dost *thou* too forget and forsake me, and withhold from me those comforts which I now so much need to sustain me? What, even *me*, my Father? How many of thy children in the midst of their trials, have been upheld by thy presence and consolations? Hast thou relieved them, and dost thou forsake *me*? *Me*.

thine only begotten, thy dear, thine eternal Son?  
 “ My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?”

O what a voice was this to proceed from the Son of God! Nature trembled at these complaints of its Creator; the sun shrouded itself in darkness, and started back astonished to behold the Sun of Righteousness, from whom it received its light, setting in darkness and in blood; the earth trembled to its centre; death heard the cry in his inmost caverns, and dropped the chains with which his prisoners were bound, and permitted them to start into life. All nature sympathized with its God; man alone remained unmoved; man scoffed, while angels wept; man's heart remained unbroken, while the very rocks were rent asunder.

Thus Jesus continues suffering till the predestined work for which he assumed our nature is accomplished. When justice is satisfied, when every wo is undergone, and every prophecy accomplished, he calmly, tranquilly, and freely commends his spirit to the hands of his Father; cries in the language of triumph, and with a joy which the pains he endured could not destroy, “ It is finished;” bows his head, and expires. Thy sufferings are consummated, merciful Jesus, and with them our redemption: God can now be just in saving the rebellious; and the door of heaven, which was barred by the apostacy, is again opened for the children of men.

II. And now, my brethren, what effects shall this review of the sufferings of our Lord produce upon us? Shall we be satisfied merely with exercising the emotions of natural sympathy, and pouring forth our tears over our crucified Lord? Oh no! other and more important sentiments should occupy our hearts; for the eternal Son of God submitted to this deep hu-

miliation and wo for far nobler purposes than to excite a weak and idle pity. Even at the moment when he was advancing to execution, he exhorted those who grieved for him to reflect rather upon themselves; and now that he is in the regions of glory, he cries to us in much louder accents, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves."

1. Plant yourselves then at the foot of his cross, and let your sympathy be converted into a holy indignation against those sins in which you have indulged. These were the true executioners of the holy Jesus; these rioted in his agonies, and crushed out his life; these kindled those flames that could be extinguished only by his blood; and will you still practise and love these iniquities? Ah! *dare you* still retain them, and suffer them to reign in your hearts, notwithstanding the awful display of God's hatred of them that is given in the tremendous sacrifice of Immanuel? If "God spared not his own Son," will he spare thee, thoughtless sinner, who trifled with the blood of the cross, and cherishest the murderers of Jesus? If sin be not mortified within thee, thou must in thine own person encounter those flames which consumed this precious sacrifice; upon thine own head must descend the thunders which here burst upon the Saviour. Art thou able to endure them? Ah! far better had it been for thee never to have been born, than to fix thy view upon the cross, and yet remain impenitent.

But why, on an occasion which recalls to us the amazing grace of God, and in the presence of that holy table where charity is enthroned and pleads with sinners, do I present considerations to appal and terrify? Let me rather urge you by tender motives; let me hope that you will feel the constraints of love:

look to the suffering Jesus, and if you are not destitute of every generous feeling, the mercy that is here displayed, must melt your heart, and cause you to renounce and hate all sin. Say to yourself, ‘ Can my sins be as dear to me, as the eternal Son was to the Father? And if for me the Father gave his Son to agonies unutterable, shall I esteem it hard at his command to abandon the ways of iniquity? When the Son of God has been so gracious as to lay down his life for me, shall I ungratefully retain those sins which he hated more than all the shame and torture which he endured on their account?’ Surely, my brethren, if we are not lost to all that is tender, ingenuous, or grateful, reflections of this kind must touch our hearts, and cause us to exclaim with the apostle, “ The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again.” (2 Cor. v. 14, 15.) “ The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.” (Tit. ii. 11—14.)

2. Mourning penitents! approach to the cross of Jesus, that you may obtain the *pardon* of your offences, and *repose* to your agitated consciences. “ Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” From the thunders rolling against

you from Sinai, seek an asylum on Calvary at the foot of your expiring Saviour's cross. To the awful denunciation against the sinner, "Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them," oppose the louder accents of Jesus, "It is finished : " ' the law must be observed, its curse must be executed ; but this curse has been borne by me ; justice has dyed its sword in my blood ; and your redemption is accomplished.' Say with a holy confidence, ' Is it true that my sins are so many and aggravated, that no created power, not even the angel that stands next the throne of the Lord, no humble and continued prayers, no floods of tears, no years of penance, can remove their guilt ? But had I all the sins which are on earth united in my person, still from a bleeding Saviour I could find mercy. Since " it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief of sinners," I will not despair. On his grace I will cast my soul : on his cross I will hang my sins and my fears. " Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me whole."

3. Children of affliction, look to the suffering Jesus, that you may be *comforted in your sorrows, and cheered in your discouragements*. " Consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." To the infinite mercy which, as God, your Redeemer possesses, is added that sympathy which arises from a participation of your woes. " Since then you have not an high-priest, who cannot be touched with a feeling of your infirmities, but one who was in all points tempted as you are, yet without sin, go boldly to the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Are you exposed to reproach

and contempt, to the sneers of the ungodly, and the scoffs of the wicked? Look to Jesus, execrated, derided, and cursed, "scorned and rejected of men." Are you afflicted with inward griefs, with sorrows of soul, with darkness and desertion? Look to him, who, "in the days of his flesh, offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto God;" who exclaimed, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;" who, in his mysterious dereliction upon the cross, cried, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" Does the world attempt to terrify you by its violence, or seduce you by its allurements? On the cross you see Jesus undauntedly braving its fury, and trampling on its gilded vanities. From the habitation of his holiness he looks down upon you, and says, "Thus was I oppressed and tempted: and these my children suffer for my sake and not for their own." Is your reputation slandered by the ungodly? Ah! how much severer were the reproaches that were cast upon the holy Jesus! Are you in a lowly situation in life? Mark the deep abasement of the Redeemer, and bless God for those enjoyments which you possess, and which were denied to him.

Whatever may be your calamities, go to the cross; there you will learn, as did Paul, to rejoice in your sufferings. There you will learn, as did the first believers, to exult even in tortures and upon racks, to defy the malice and the power of earth and hell.

4. Dying men, look to the expiring Saviour for consolation and direction. Precious as he is at all times, his name is doubly dear on the threshold of eternity. Like him, employ the time that may yet be granted to you, in "finishing the work which your Father hath given you to do;" like him, employ

your last moments for the glory of God, for the consolation and instruction of those around you, in prayers for your enemies. Then, in your closing hours, you may say, ‘*Father*; by this endearing name I am emboldened to address thee, through the covenant ratified by the blood of thy Son: *Father* of my Saviour, *into thy hands I commit my unworthy spirit*: through Jesus I trust thou wilt receive it as thou didst his holy and innocent soul.’

Communicants, when you commemorate the death of Jesus, think then of your own, which is rapidly approaching. Since we know not whether some of us will not be in the eternal world before we have another opportunity of celebrating this sacred festival, let us, while we hold in our hands the consecrated symbols, commit our souls to God, and with faith and fervour supplicate his protection, his grace, the application of the blood of his Son, and the manifestation of his love in the last struggles of nature; so that when Jesus shall come as our judge, and cry again with regard to time itself, “*It is finished*;” we may rise with joy from our tombs, and advance with humble confidence to his throne.

It would be delightful to expatiate longer on this subject; it will not be exhausted by eternity itself. But we must pause; for our Beloved calls us to come and put a new seal to our covenant and our hopes. Yes, we will come to begin on earth the business of heaven, to unite our gratitude with the hallelujahs of the redeemed, and to celebrate that Jesus, who lived among men to bless them, who died to redeem them, who reigns to receive and crown them after their departure from earth.

## SERMON LIX.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XXVI.



PRAYING FOR HIS ENEMIES UPON THE CROSS.

LUKE xxiii. 34.

*Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do.*

WHO does not admire in the Saviour that union of firmness and charity, which makes him forget his own sufferings, to attend to the woes of others ; which appears to extinguish every personal feeling, in order to concentrate all his sensibility upon those whom he came to save ? In the moments which precede his sufferings, his soul is affected only by the calamities which his death will produce upon the nation that has inflicted it ; and beholding in the future the calamities of Judea, he turns the attention of the afflicted females who lamented his sorrows, to their own woes ; and the last address which he makes to them, the last adieus which he utters, are contained in these touching words : “ Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children.”

This same temper was displayed when extended upon the cross. The sufferings which he endures



do not make him insensible to the interests of those ungrateful men who inflicted them. The voice of charity is alone heard from him, and the first words that proceed from those lips, ready to breathe their last sigh, are words of peace, of love, of intercession: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Whence shall I derive ideas, expressions, proper to paint with any energy the sublimity of that moment? Ah! the language of men, that even of angels, here fails. All that I can hope, or dare attempt, is to inspire you with a desire of imitating this sublime example. To accomplish this, let us,

I. View the prayer of the Saviour in itself. And then,

II. In relation to ourselves, as a model and object of imitation.

I. To this prayer of the Saviour is to be attached no sense unworthy of the Son of God, incompatible with the doctrine which he came to teach men, or opposed to the divine attributes. The blessing that he asks, then, evidently is this, that God would suspend the strokes of his justice which these guilty men had deserved; that he would grant them leisure to see their criminality, and grace to inspire them with repentance; that he would then blot out their iniquities in that blood which they were shedding. "Father, forgive them." He graciously pleads their ignorance as an extenuation of their offence. They see not his divine glory; they know not his excellence; they think that they render God service by persecuting, by nailing the Messiah to the cross. "They know not what they do."

And was not this prayer heard? The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the dispersion of the

nation, which had denied the Holy One and the Just, and nailed the Prince of Life to the cross, were suspended in consequence of it. Forty years of delay and long-suffering are still granted; and during this time the apostles passed through Judea, announced the gospel of peace to the crucifiers of their Divine Master, published the doctrines of salvation, and sealed their testimony with their blood. The conversion of a vast multitude of Jews, among whom were many of the most ardent persecutors of Christ, was the happy fruit of this delay, and of the effusion of the Spirit granted to the intercession of the Son of God. At the foot of the cross, the Roman centurion avows him to be the Son of God. The troops who are present, moved with compassion, smite upon their breasts. On the day of Pentecost, three thousand are converted. Five thousand shortly after profess him as their Lord, whom they had crucified. The cross every day had new triumphs in Judea. May we not also add, as a proof of the efficacy of this prayer, the miraculous preservation of the Jewish people for more than eighteen centuries, and the assurance that they will finally return, and be converted to the Prince of Life, whom their fathers had slain.

But I hasten to consider this prayer,

II. *As a perfect model for our imitation.*

To love our enemies, to wish well to them, to render them good for evil, is one of the very first duties of Christianity. In order to engage us to the performance of it, we have the most tender and impressive example that can be given. He who, by the most astonishing mercy, engages us to obey his laws; He, from whom we expect our salvation, and whose death seals to us the remission of our sins. teaches

us, from his example, to forgive our enemies, and preaches this great duty from the height of the cross. Represent to yourselves, Christians, your Saviour and your Lord, become the victim of your sins; paint to yourselves this Jesus contending with the inconceivable woes which his charity causes him to undergo for you; see him extending this charity even to his executioners, covering them with his intercession, as with a buckler, against the anger, crying, "Father, forgive them," and here learn your duty to your brethren.

Let the revengeful man allege the most specious pretexts to justify his vengeance, let him unite every thing that will appear to sanction his fury, and let him then come and compare his case with that of Jesus, his woes with those of the Son of God, and he will see the frivolity of all his *excuses* for his neglect of this duty.

Is it a *great* injury and outrage you have received? Ah! how trifling in comparison to the agonies of the bleeding victim of love!

Is it inflicted by the hand of *one whom you loved*? Ah! what is your most ardent affection to that which Jesus felt for his murderers? What have you done for him who has injured you, in comparison to what the Son of God did to rescue his enemy from hell?

Are the injuries inflicted on you multiplied, reiterated, and persevering? From the manger to the cross, those whom Jesus came to pluck from everlasting ruin pursued him with the most ferocious cruelty.

Approach, then, to the Son of God, nailed to the cross by guilty mortals; experiencing at once the most cruel suffering and the most painful outrages; and before this charity of Christ, which passeth all understanding, shall not your most implacable re-

sentments be extinguished, and the arms of revenge fall from your hands ?

This great example, seriously considered, confounds also those studied disguises under which so many persons conceal their resentment, while they pretend to forgiveness. Such persons renounce vengeance ; but they still continue to hate, and they see with a secret delight the afflictions of those who have injured them. But behold your Saviour. He not only abstains from vengeance ; he does more ; he implores for them the mercy of God, and obtains the choicest blessings. Learn, like him, to rejoice in conferring benefits upon your enemies.

This duty of forgiveness, to which we are thus solemnly exhorted by the cross of Christ, is enjoined upon us also by many other most impressive considerations.

1. It is solemnly *commanded by your Judge* ; and your performance or neglect of it is represented as inseparably connected with the decisions of the final day. “ If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.” “ Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use and persecute you.” To the same purpose he utters that striking parable of the unforgiving servant, who, forgetting the infinite mercies of his God, would not pardon a fellow-man, and who fell under the indignation of his Lord. To keep this duty always fresh upon our minds, our Redeemer incorporates it in our daily prayer ; and if from our hearts we do not forgive our enemies, every time we use this prayer, we imprecate everlasting damnation on our own

heads. Oh! then, let us renounce the hopes of a Christian, if malice or revenge is cherished in our hearts.

2. The *apostles enjoin the same great duty*, and every where cry to us, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.” “Be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” “He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy.” These injunctions are supported by the examples of the saints in every age. Thus Joseph pardoned his cruel brethren; thus Moses interceded for those who rebelled against him; thus David spared his persecutor; thus Stephen, with his expiring breath, prayed for his enemies; thus Paul declares of himself and his fellow-apostles, “Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat.” Can we hope to dwell with them in felicity, if we do not imitate their conduct, and imbibe their temper here below?

3. And let us remember, my brethren, that *our most furious foes cannot injure us, if God is our friend*. They cannot erase our name from the book of life; they cannot suspend the influences of heaven; they cannot exclude the comforts of the Spirit; they cannot deprive us of the hopes of glory; they cannot wrest from us our faith and our love. They will indeed succeed in injuring us, if they can inspire us with revenge, and thus cause us to offend God and violate his commandments. But if we can indeed forgive, their darts are harmless, and they only claim our pity, our compassion, and our prayers.

Let us, then, Christians, cultivate this temper. We are all of the number of those enemies for whom Jesus died, for whom he prayed, and whom he reconciled to God. Often place yourselves, in imagination, between your Saviour on the one side, and your enemies on the other. Listen to this Saviour on the cross; view him on his awful tribunal, before which you must solicit pardon. Hark! while from this tribunal he declares that the unforgiving shall sink into endless despair; that your Judge shall entertain those sentiments for you which you have for your enemies; then turn to these enemies, and, constrained by the charity and terrors of the Lord, forgive and love them.

Go to the foot of the cross, where the bleeding Saviour pronounces the remission of your offences, and there pardon your offending brothers; there embrace your most mortal enemies, and disarm them by your tears and love. The same blood, which implores pardon for you, demands of you pardon for them; and if it blots out the offences which render you criminal before God, it should efface all those offences which they have committed against you. Injurers and injured, together look to Calvary; there mingle the tears of forgiveness and clemency with those of repentance; and, united by a same love to your common Redeemer, become common imitators of his charity.

## SERMON LX.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XXVII.



JESUS COMMITTING MARY TO JOHN.

JOHN XIX. 25—27.

*Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.*

THE last words of dying persons have always appeared worthy of regard. If there ever be a season calculated to produce in our souls great, noble, elevated sentiments, it is then when about to lose the objects of earth from our sight, we fully discover all their nothingness, and fix our meditations on the scenes of eternity. But if the last words of ordinary men thus engage our attention, how should we fasten our mind on those uttered by the expiring Saviour? Many memorable expressions proceeded from the lips of Jesus during his final sufferings, but none

more affecting than those related in the text. We admire the divine charity with which he intercedes for his murderers; but we are melted at the tenderness which breathes in this address to Mary and to John; we recognise in it that High Priest, that Son of man as well as Son of God, who has been tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. Let us then fix our view upon this interesting picture, and examine all its traits.

The circumstances related in the text occurred during this period. Jesus was now nailed to the instrument of torture, and consummating the mystery of redemption. At the foot of the cross, he beholds one little group, which alone, in the vast assembly, does not riot in his griefs, but "is afflicted in all his afflictions." It consisted of Mary, his mother according to the flesh; of Mary, the wife of Cleophas, who, with her sons James and Joses, had embraced his doctrine, and acknowledged him as her Lord; of Magdalene, concerning whom it is recorded that "she loved much, because much had been forgiven her;" and of John, whose amiable disposition had excited a peculiar love in the breast of his Master, and whose constancy at this period, when the other disciples had fled, proved that he was not undeserving of this preference. Whilst rage sparkled in the eyes of the Jews, astonishment was painted on the face of these friends of the Redeemer, and grief preyed upon their heart. As they sorrowfully contemplated the agonies of Jesus, he turned upon them his eyes, which already began to be weighed down by the hand of death. He beholds his mother about to lose in him her consolation, her hope, her support. Forgetting his own sufferings, he is solicitous only for her welfare, and appoints his beloved



disciple to dry her tears and supply her necessities. "He saith unto his mother, Woman," dearest and most beloved of women, "behold thy son;" regard this my disciple with the tenderness of a parent. And thou, faithful John, "behold thy mother;" revere, comfort, and support her, as though thou wert her child. The apostle joyously receives this precious pledge of his Saviour's love, "and from that hour took her to his own home."

This history affords us a variety of useful instructions, the principal of which will be presented to you while we illustrate the following ideas:

I. The conduct of these disciples sets before us a model of Christian fortitude and zeal.

II. The contemplation of the sufferings of Mary, and of the manner in which she endured them, admonishes those who are murmuring at far lighter sorrows.

III. The words and actions of Jesus afford us an example of filial affection, and a proof of his tender solicitude for his friends.

IV. And the ready compliance of John with the injunction of his Master, teaches us some of the characteristics of sincere obedience, and forms a powerful argument for the divinity of the religion of Christ.

I do not ask you, my brethren, to favour me with your attention: it is surely secured by such interesting events. But I ask, I beseech thee, merciful Jesus, who art no longer upon thy cross, but on thy throne, to animate us with one favourable look, so that the meditation of this subject may tend to our holiness and comfort.

1. *In the conduct of these disciples we have a model of Christian fortitude and zeal.* Transport yourselves for

a moment to Calvary, and observe the scene that is there passing. Jesus is suspended on the engine of death, and surrounded by implacable enemies, who, having slain the Master, are now thirsting for the blood of his followers. His friends, his disciples, terrified, stand trembling at a distance. At such a time as this, three tender females, and the youngest of the apostles, to whom life would seem to be most valuable, have the courage to advance, to press through the crowd, and to go so near to the cross that they can see and hear their Lord. They know that the greatest perils attend this display of their affection; they know that it is the custom of the world to abandon virtue in disgrace; they know that they may plead the example of others to justify them for their dereliction of the Saviour; they know that their hearts will be pained by hearing the most contemptuous reproaches uttered against their Master, and by beholding his struggles with death. But no personal sorrows or dangers can make them resolve to abandon Jesus in his last moments, and in his deepest anguish. No personal woes or perils can induce them to forego the ardent desire that they have of attesting their love, of profiting by his example, of showing their compassion for his sufferings, and of receiving his last instructions. And do not suppose that they did not anticipate these woes and perils. It was impossible that they should overlook them: they beheld them in all their magnitude. *Nature* would have shrunk from them; *grace* rose superior to them. Faith and gratitude inspired these generous spirits with a resolution to lay down their lives, to mingle their blood with that of their Lord, rather than forsake him in his distresses.

You admire this model, my brethren; would you have imitated it? Alas! I fear that there are many of us who now term ourselves the disciples of Jesus, who, if we were called to bear our testimony to his name in the face of his cross, and in the midst of his enemies, would cry out with Peter, "I know not the man!" or, with his ungrateful disciples, would keep aloof from danger. But leaving the consideration of these circumstances, which may never happen, let us attend to matters that are immediately before our eyes. What a reproof then does this display of fortitude and zeal give to you who are willing to follow Jesus, while he leads you through pleasant and agreeable paths, but who turn your backs upon him as soon as persecution threatens; who are willing to accompany him to Tabor, where every thing is glorious, but who forsake him as soon as you must bear the cross after him, and trace his bloody steps upon Calvary! What a reproof does it give to you who, when like these holy women you are in the midst of profane scoffers and deriders, "are ashamed of the Son of man and his words," tremble to own him in the midst of those who are "crucifying him afresh," and blush to be esteemed his disciples! What a reproof does it give to you who, though ready to make some small sacrifice to the Saviour, yet shrink back as soon as life or its chief enjoyments are to be put to stake in order to evince your zealous devotion to him! Ah! temporary Christians, men influenced by a criminal shame, lukewarm professors, behold in these generous women and this beloved disciple, a pattern which condemns you! In the midst of the greatest perils, they are neither afraid nor ashamed to pour out their tears for the sorrows of their Saviour, and to declare,

by their whole deportment, that they glory in being his friends. They tremble not to meet death in the discharge of their duty; they would rejoice to be made conformed to their Lord in his sufferings. Act like them. Resolve to follow your Master with constancy and perseverance, with boldness and zeal, "through evil as well as good report," or you will never partake of that glory in which they now dwell. And do not plead your weakness as an excuse for your coldness and your abandonment of the interests of Jesus. That grace which gave such courage to timid females, is able to inspire you with resolution; and if you fail, it is only because you do not, like them, seek from God the supports of this grace, and the protection of the Most High.

2. But let us select the principal object from this little group, and fix our contemplation upon the unhappy Mary. Come and behold this mother, all those of you who are repining at any afflictive visitations of Providence; who are exclaiming that you could have borne any other sorrows better than those which have befallen you; who are suffering imagination to magnify your little griefs till they appear to your prejudiced eye greater than any that have been experienced by mortals: come, mourners of every class, carefully consider the woes of the Holy Virgin, that you may learn to bless God, who has spared you so many miseries that were felt by one so far exalted above you in piety and devotion towards God; plant yourselves with Mary at the foot of the cross, and whilst you there consider the sufferings of the Virgin Mother and the great Immanuel, cease to repine at afflictions which, when compared with these, shrink into nothing.

And not only the magnitude of her griefs, but also the manner in which she endures them, should teach you this useful lesson. She utters no passionate exclamations; she pours forth no violent reproaches against the murderers of her son; she indulges in no excessive expressions of her woe; she faints not under the pressure of anguish; but *stands* and silently acquiesces in the appointments of God. She feels; religion permits her to feel with exquisite sensibility this dreadful separation: but, at the same time, she submits to the righteous disposals of heaven, without murmuring or repining; submits as becomes a Christian, as becomes the mother of the incarnate Saviour.

Imitate her example, Christian female, from whose embraces death has torn a beloved child or a husband, who was all your support and consolation. Feel your loss; but set bounds to your grief. Eye the hand of God in the bereavement: like Mary, look beyond the immediate cause of your sufferings; like Mary, look upon your Saviour, and he will cast upon you, as he does upon her, one of those glances which shall calm your agitated soul.

3. The conduct and words of Jesus are to be considered in the next division of our discourse.

Though the Saviour, having now hung for more than five hours upon the cross, was weighed down with unutterable agonies, yet his soul is not absorbed by his sufferings, nor by the prospect of that glory into which he is just ready to enter. He will not commend his spirit into the hands of his Father, till he has afforded some consolation to his dear friends. He interrupts, if I may speak so, the great sacrifice of redemption; he defers for some moments to con-

summate it, that he may indulge the sentiment of filial affection. He turns then his face, which already began to be clouded with the shades of death, towards the little company of his friends. With a serenity which could result only from perfect innocence, with a firmness which made him disregard his own pains; with a sensibility exquisitely alive to the sufferings of his friends; with that tenderness which had accompanied him through all the scenes of his life—he bids his beloved disciple to revere and support Mary, and Mary, in her turn, to cherish John as a son. “He saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son: he saith to the disciple, Behold thy mother.”

Nothing is more variable than the modes of addressing persons, and testifying our respect for them. We should not now address a person whom we esteemed and loved, by the appellation of “*Woman* :” yet every one who is in the least degree acquainted with the writers of antiquity, knows that it was formerly a most honourable title, frequently employed by those who meant to show the highest attention. Numerous examples might be produced from the ancient authors, where the most accomplished persons thus address their equals; where even slaves thus address their mistresses, and subjects their queens. You probably recollect that Xenophon puts this expression in the mouth of one of the Persians, when tenderly consoling a lady of quality under severe afflictions. There is then no disrespect in this mode of address which Jesus employs. Besides, it was highly proper that he should speak to her by this title, rather than by that of *Mother*, both that her grief might not be too highly excited and her wounds opened afresh, by having this tender relationship

recalled to her mind, and likewise that she might not be pointed out to the fury of the populace, who were animated with rage, not only against Jesus, but also against all that were dear to him.

“Woman, behold thy son: behold thy mother.” What a beautiful example! what a powerful enforcement of filial affection! The Son of God forgets not that he is the son of Mary; but employs the last moments of his life in providing for her future support and comfort. As if this duty had not been made sufficiently sacred by the forcible impressions of nature, by the holy commands of the law, Jesus adds to these motives the most tender one of his dying example.

Children, of whatever age, in whatever condition you may be, will you ever violate a duty thus powerfully imposed upon you? Your Saviour was infinitely elevated above Mary by his divine nature; he had unspeakably ennobled her by condescending to be born of her; he had more than discharged the debt he owed her by the benefits he had conferred upon her; he was now in the struggles of death, when he might have been excused from attending to her concerns: yet notwithstanding all these circumstances, he is tenderly regardful of her interests. And can you, who are of the same nature with your parents, who owe them more than you ever repay by the labours of a whole life, can you fail to imitate this example of your Lord? Cherish and comfort them in their years of infirmity and weakness. Let your virtues and your attention inspire them with joy. When they die, pay your tears to their memory; respect and love them still. Or if a premature death should tear you from their embraces, and their circum-

stances should require it, say in your last moments to this relative, to this friend, "Behold your mother."

The conduct of Jesus affords us another instruction: it teaches us *in what manner we ought to meet death*. There are few who in their last hours exhibit that conduct which becometh a Christian, or is conformable to the example which our Saviour here presents to us. Some, entirely occupied by the world, cannot detach their affections from it, and we make useless efforts to turn their thoughts towards eternity. Others, flying to an opposite extreme, believe that they commit a sacrilege if they give the least thought to temporal concerns: they require, but often too late, to hear only of God and religion. "The approach of death," says one who was in the habit of attending the beds of the dying, "excites in some men turbulent emotions, which resemble frenzy more than zeal. They heap sentences of scripture upon sentences of scripture, and prayer upon prayer; and because they have not soon enough remembered their last moment, they are now so wholly occupied with it that they can see, hear, understand nothing else." Both these extremes are faulty. We must live piously, and then die as we have lived. But what is a pious life? It is a life in which the interest of our salvation occupies the principal part, but not so as to exclude an honest and prudent care of our temporal interests. It is the same with a pious death. When the believer sees that he must quit the world, he should wisely divide the precious moments which remain to him, and whilst he gives a part to religion, should occupy a part in consoling his weeping friends, and in giving the final adieu and last impressive advice to those whom he loves. He may, nay he ought to make those provisions for his



family that justice and charity require. In doing so, he finishes the task which providence assigned him; and God will as much accept those moments as though they had been spent in prayers and supplications. It is not till after Jesus has provided for Mary, that he cries, "*It is finished;*" that he turns his eyes to God, and exclaims, "*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*"

"And he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son; and to the disciple, Behold thy mother." Thus does the Saviour at all times provide for the wants of his friends. When one pleasure is removed, he sends another to supply its place: when we appear to be left desolate and forsaken, he raises up friends and benefactors. Mary is deprived of Jesus, but she finds in John a son. Tell me, ye needy and afflicted Christians, has not your Master frequently dealt thus with you? When every thing has appeared gloomy and disconsolate, when there appeared for you no means of support, no sources of pleasure, has not your Lord raised up some John to relieve your wants and cheer your sorrows? Confidently then rely upon your Saviour at all times, and he will not leave you comfortless. If upon the cross he still could think upon his friends, much more, now that he is in heaven, inaccessible to pain and possessed of all power, will he regard your griefs. Though your prospects may be dark and discouraging, they are not more so than were those of Mary. Do not then despond. He can bring relief to you by a thousand means of which you cannot conceive. And he will in the gloomiest season interpose for your deliverance. "Why then are ye cast down, O our souls, and why are ye disquieted within us? Hope in

God ;" hope also in Jesus who tenderly sympathizes in all our pains.

4. John delayed not to comply with the injunction of the Saviour. " And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home." Thus should we always obey the commandments of Jesus without hesitation, with an holy joy. Had St. John had the spirit of modern Christians, he would have urged many pleas to prevent his compliance. He would have urged his own indigence, the necessity of first taking care of himself, and a thousand other circumstances, equally common and equally futile. But John knew no reserves. The moment the command of his Lord was clear and express, he set himself to obey it. Christians, the same command which Jesus gave to John from the cross, he gives to us from heaven. His mother according to the flesh is not, it is true, upon the earth ; but he has among us a mother, brothers, sisters, equally dear to him. Recollect his own declaration : " Then said one unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak to thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother, and who are my brethren ? And he stretched forth his hands towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my mother, and sister, and brother." Will you then imitate the conduct of John, and like him become the disciple that Jesus loves ? Go and provide for those needy persons whom you may relieve ; dry the tears of the afflicted and disconsolate ; cheer and animate that dejected believer ; succour the fatherless and the widow. These unhappy objects now represent the mother of Jesus. Cherish and assist them from

a principle of love to Christ, and the recompense that St. John received, shall be yours also. Cherish and assist them, and then when the world shall vanish from your dying eyes, Jesus “shall take *you* to his own home,” to his “Father’s house, in which are many mansions.” There you shall dwell with him in fulness of joy through the ceaseless ages of eternity.

This confidence of Jesus in his disciple, and this obedience of the disciple to the words of Jesus, afford a decisive argument in favour of the divine mission of Jesus Christ. The Saviour without hesitation commits to John what he had most dear upon earth; nay, he appears to speak to him even from the cross with his accustomed authority, “Behold thy mother.” But if the Son of Mary had been an impostor, who had abused the credulity of the people, and who had imposed on his own disciples, how would he have dared at the moment when his iniquity was about to be manifested, to commit his mother to the most abused of his disciples? Would not this have been to expose this mother to the most humiliating situation? What reason had Jesus to expect this proof of zeal from his disciple? Could he flatter himself that he would still be his dupe, if I may dare thus to express myself? Oh! assuredly Jesus, when he gave this order, knew that he should evidence his right to give it by a glorious resurrection: he did not fear to commit into the hands of John his mother according to the flesh, since he knew that in less than three days all the importance of this legacy would be seen. I repeat it then, if Jesus had not been the Messiah, the Son of God, he would never have committed his mother to a disciple, who the more he had loved his Master would the more detest him, if he discovered that he had been unworthily deceived by him.

## SERMON LXI.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XXVIII.



HIS CRY UPON THE CROSS UNDER HIS DERELICTION.

MARK XV. 34.

*And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying.  
Eloi, Eloi, Lama sabacthani, which is, being interpreted,  
My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

THE death of illustrious men is almost always the most interesting and affecting part of their history. We love to contemplate their behaviour in those last moments in which they leave a world, where they have acted so distinguished a part. Our interest is inconceivably heightened, when we have been connected with them by esteem or friendship, or when we have received from them any signal favour. Then we hang upon those lips, which are so soon to be closed for ever; we drink in with avidity the last accents of that tongue which is so soon to be silenced; we endeavour to catch the last flashes of that mind that is no longer to instruct us, the last sentiments of that heart which will shortly beat no more. The minutest details that relate to the death of a father, of a friend, of a benefactor, appear important, and we cannot recall without tears what they said or did,

when combating with the king of terrors. Every thing then must be interesting to us, in the detail of the death and sufferings of the Redeemer of the world: there is not a single circumstance of this death that ought to be remembered without emotion. But especially does that part of our Saviour's passion, that we have selected for our meditation, claim your attention and sympathy. It presents to you Jesus Christ expiring upon the cross; Jesus Christ plunged into an abyss of woes, and about to commend his soul into the hands of his Father. It presents to you your friend, your brother, your Saviour, contending with the most painful death, sinking, for your sakes, under the avenging justice of God, and making Calvary resound with that sorrowful exclamation, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?"

While all nature then sympathized with the Saviour, what should be our emotions, Christians, at beholding a spectacle so afflictive, at hearing a cry so distressing? Can we fail to participate in the dying groans of him who is expiating our sins, and consummating the work of our redemption? Ah! if ever your hearts were affected by the great truths announced to you from this sacred desk; if ever your souls were moved by the exhortations of your pastors, these affections and emotions should be exercised to-day. You owe them to this recital of the most interesting part of your Saviour's passion; you owe them to the love which the Son of God displayed for you till his last sigh; you owe them to the wrath of God, which he bore for you; to that anguish, to those conflicts, which he endured for your sakes; to that voice, capable of penetrating hearts harder than the rocks themselves.

This discourse shall have two parts. In the

First, We shall endeavour to show the true sense of this exclamation of our Saviour, and the nature of that grief which caused him to utter it. In the

Second, We shall inquire what sentiments ought to be produced by this afflictive cry of Jesus, in the hearts of those who profess to consider him as the victim immolated for their sins.

I. In seeking the true sense of this exclamation of the Saviour, it is not necessary to enumerate the various improper interpretations that have been given to it. It will be sufficient if we first remove the false senses of which it may appear susceptible, and then establish its real meaning.

1. Do not suppose that this exclamation indicates any repugnance to the great sacrifice that the Saviour was then offering to God for the salvation of mankind, any repentance for the submission he had exercised to the will of his heavenly Father. Jesus Christ had clearly foreseen his death, with the most afflictive circumstances that were to accompany it: he had frequently predicted it; he knew that he came into the world in order to suffer it; he had always rebuked with severity his disciples, when they would dissuade him from it; he had expressed the most ardent desire for its approach. "I have a baptism [of suffering] to be baptized with, and how am I straightened until it be accomplished?" was his language on one occasion, "I have desired to eat this passover with you," was his expression, the same night he instituted the holy supper, to be a memorial of his death. Jesus Christ then perfectly knew the greatness of the work he had undertaken, and clearly foresaw all that he had to suffer as our Redeemer; and yet voluntarily and deliberately braved it all. Witness the resolution with which he advanced to

those who came to apprehend him; witness the silence which he kept before Caiaphas when false witnesses were produced against him; witness the confession which he made in the presence of this judge; witness his replies to Pilate; witness the whole history of the passion. He cannot then be considered as a victim dragged to the altar, but as a free, voluntary victim, who, knowing all the circumstances of his death, submitted to it freely and cheerfully, from charity to man. Of consequence, this exclamation cannot be attributed to any want of courage or resignation, to any regret for having engaged in this painful work. No, my brethren, the same submission to God, which led Jesus Christ to devote himself to the death of the cross for us, attended him, supported him, all the time he was fastened to it, until he had uttered his last sigh. These words then do not denote any change of will in the Saviour, any repugnance to fulfil the purposes of his heavenly Father.

2. This exclamation does not denote the least doubt or distrust in Jesus Christ, of the love that his Father entertained for him. We may confidently assert, without fear of contradiction, that there never was an instant in which Jesus Christ ceased to trust in God, and regard him as a tender Father; never an instant in which he was not persuaded that he was God's beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased. And especially now that he was on the cross accomplishing the eternal purposes of God, giving the strongest proof of devotion to his will, and the most amazing exhibition of that charity in which he delights, he was, if possible, more fully than ever persuaded of the infinite love of his Father for him. This assertion is proved by our text itself, in which the Saviour, at the height of his sufferings, addresses

his Father, by a title full of love and confidence, "My God, my God." It is proved by the sentiments that he expressed some moments after, when he uttered his last sigh, saying, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." It is proved by a passage in the tenth chapter of John, where Christ himself mentions his death as the foundation of that tender affection which his Father had for him. "The Father loveth me, because I lay down my life for the sheep." It is certain then, that Jesus, when upon the cross, ceased not to regard God as his God and Father; and we must, therefore, not consider this exclamation as implying any doubt or distrust of the affection of his Father.

3. This exclamation is not to be interpreted as if the divine nature of Christ experienced any sufferings. The divine nature, possessed of immutable happiness and infinite joy, is incapable of sorrow or pain. The two natures were so united in the Saviour as not to be confounded and mingled together, and in all his sufferings, the divinity was quiescent, and ceased to exert itself. It gave dignity and value to his sufferings; it so supported the humanity as to prevent it from being crushed by the infinite agonies which descended on the Saviour; but it neither partook of, nor diminished the severity of these agonies.

Having separated all these false ideas from the text, we ask, what is the true sense of this expression, and what were the sufferings which caused it? If these words express no murmuring nor distrust, nor want of resolution and courage, what do they signify? For the more the Saviour was resigned to death, the more he trusted in God, the more he was persuaded of the affection of his Father, by so much



the more strange does it appear that he should cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" How different is this language from that of the ancient martyrs! When we read the history of their sufferings, and of their last hours, we cannot but perceive an immense difference between their death and that of Jesus Christ. Their souls appear to have been inaccessible to the most cruel torments, and no complaint issues from their mouth. On the contrary, they esteemed themselves happy to be permitted to suffer for the Redeemer, and were tranquil and joyous in the midst of their pains. To discern the cause of this difference between the martyrs and the Saviour, and at the same time to perceive the nature of the sufferings, which then afflicted Jesus Christ, and produced this expression, attend to the situation in which your Redeemer then was. We had broken the just and holy law of God, and had become exposed to endless punishment, both in soul and in body. Jesus Christ, to deliver us, became our pledge and surety; consented to bear the punishment due to us, and, "though he knew no sin, was made a sin-offering for us," and "bore our sins in his own body on the cross." As we had sinned both in body and in soul, both our bodies and our souls were exposed to punishment; Christ, standing in our place, must suffer, therefore, both in his body and his soul. You know his corporeal pains, they have often been described to you; but in vain would you attempt to conceive those sufferings of his soul, which caused him to utter the words of our text. Although, considered as the Son of God, he was still the object of his paternal love, yet, considered as our surety, bearing the load of our sins, he had all the terrors of the Lord set in array against him; he

was encompassed by the indignation of the Almighty; he experienced agonies which none but a God could inflict, and none but one who had the strength of Deity to support him, could for a moment have sustained; by the woes which entered into his soul, while he hung upon the cross, he counterpoised the eternal damnation of so many millions of mankind. Although as the Son of God, he was assured of the favourable regards of his Father, yet, as Saviour, he was deprived of that joyful sense of the divine presence and consolations which forms the felicity of angels and glorified spirits; and his soul, pressed down by the sins of the world, felt a deprivation of the cheering light of God's favour, and made him cry out in anguish, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?"

This exclamation, then, is not the language of the Son of God, considered as such; since the Son of God has never been abandoned by his Father; neither is it the language of a mere martyr, who suffers and dies to seal with his blood the gospel he has preached; but the voice of the "Lamb without blemish and without spot, slain from the foundation of the world;" the voice of the Saviour, who is experiencing not merely the bitterness of death, not merely the tortures of the cross, but tortures infinitely more severe and overwhelming that were felt in his soul, and that were inseparably connected with the propitiatory sacrifice that he then was offering; the voice of our Surety, who remained under the frowns of the Judge of the earth, that "the propitious smiles of a reconciled Father might be vouchsafed to his people, to cheer them amidst all the afflictions of a frowning world, to gild their last moments with peace and triumph, and to consum-

mate their joys in the eternal sunshine of uncreated bliss in the kingdom of God.”

But it is not sufficient for us to discover the sense of these words, and the reasons that the Saviour had to utter this pathetic lamentation. We must also see what effects it ought to produce in our hearts, what sentiments it ought to excite in our bosoms. This is our

*Second division.*

1. What tender sympathy and compassion should be excited in our hearts by these sufferings of the Saviour! For do not think that because this death had been predicted and determined in the counsel of God, because it was absolutely necessary for the redemption of the world, that therefore you need not sympathize with the woes of Jesus. If he had been merely a great man, an illustrious prophet, could you without emotion see him nailed to the accursed cross? It is natural to compassionate the miseries of the unhappy. A virtuous heart suffers every time that it sees innocence oppressed, or the pious sacrificed to the hatred or vengeance of the wicked. If, therefore, Jesus Christ were, in your estimation, only a holy man, whom so many virtues ought to have rendered dear to his nation, still his punishment ought to affect you, ought to draw forth those regrets and sympathies which we never refuse to the unhappy. But, my brethren, in what manner will you view this death, when you consider it not merely as the death of a holy man, worthy of a better lot, but as the death of the Son of God; as the death of a brother, of a friend, of the most tender friend that you have ever possessed; as a cruel, accursed death, accompanied with the severest and most bitter griefs; as a death from which he might

in an instant have delivered himself, but which he voluntarily suffered for the sake of you, and to deliver you from misery inconceivable? Judge of the weight of his sufferings by the bitterness of his cry; judge of it by the magnitude of the supports by which he was sustained, but to which in this moment he appears insensible. Jesus Christ, it is true, is nailed to the cross, exposed to the wrath of God, but he just touches the moment of his deliverance. He has endured, without complaining, the most inhuman and most barbarous treatment, and he now sees the moment approaching, which is to terminate his miseries and crown his labours; he sees the salvation of mankind almost consummated; he sees heaven opened, his throne erected, the angels preparing to attend his triumph. Nevertheless, notwithstanding supports so powerful, he is absorbed by the immensity of his woes; what he is suffering for us upon the cross eclipses from his eyes all the glory with which he is just ready to be crowned; and he cries out, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" What! my brethren, have you tears and regrets to pay for the death of a child, of a brother, of a friend, who was dear to you? Have you tears to bestow on the recital of the sorrows of an unknown person, of a stranger? And can you, then, contemplate with indifference and without emotion the bitter death of your brother, of your friend, of that adorable Saviour, who has loved you more than his own life?

2. But tears and sympathy are not all that we owe to the Saviour; he demands from us also our love, our gratitude, the unreserved consecration of our hearts to him. And what love, what devotion, can ever equal the love which Jesus Christ manifested in dying for us? Though our heart should be warmed

with the most ardent and tender affection; though we should consecrate to him every instant of our lives; though all our desires should be centered in him; though our whole life, in this world and throughout eternity, should be spent in celebrating his praises, in admiring what he has done and suffered for us; do you think that you would have made an equal return for the love of Jesus? "Greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friends;" and when you were his enemies, Jesus did not merely lay down his life for you, endured not only the punishment of the cross, but sorrows and agonies a thousand times more bitter than the cross itself. The waves of divine vengeance rolled over his head, and beat upon his soul, to procure for you salvation. What does so much love deserve? Jesus Christ gave himself for us; we must give ourselves to him without reserve. Jesus Christ was for our sakes forsaken of God; we must for his sake renounce our dearest attachments, and have no desire or inclination except to please and obey him. Jesus Christ has loved us more than life: we ought to give him love for love, and entertain for him an affection far superior to our attachment to any earthly object. Oh! what powerful claims has he to our undivided hearts; how dearly has he purchased them! He claims them by the blood which he has shed, by the nails which have pierced his hands and his feet, by the torments which he has suffered, by the severity of those pangs which pressed heavy upon his soul. And will you refuse these hearts which he demands of you, as the only return that he expects for all that he has done and suffered, and which he has so dearly purchased? Will you continue to give them to the world and its vanities? No. bless-

ed Jesus, merciful Redeemer, our hearts shall be thine; they shall henceforth burn with no other love than love to thee; they shall live and breathe but for thee; thou shalt reign in them supreme and unrivalled.

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## SERMON LXII.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XXIX.



RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

ACTS v. 30, 31, 32.

A CONSIDERATION of the conduct of the greater part of those who profess to believe in Christianity, gives us but too much cause to doubt whether they are really persuaded of the truth of this religion. To believe so holy a religion, and to live a worldly and sinful life, these are two things which it is difficult to reconcile, perhaps they are entirely incompatible. It is not then a useless labour for the ministers of the gospel to endeavour to persuade their hearers of the divinity of the gospel which they preach. It is proper for us constantly to press those powerful motives to obedience which the gospel presents to lead men to piety: but nevertheless, it is certain, that these motives will have no effect upon an unbelieving heart; and probably this unbelief is the cause of the little ef-

fect of our preaching. It will not then be a loss of time to demonstrate to you that the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which St. Peter declares in the text, is a certain fact; as certain as any of those which are recorded in history, and regarded as incontestable. This is what I shall endeavour to do in the ensuing discourse. It is not an unimportant matter. If we can establish the certainty of the resurrection of Christ, we establish at the same time, the certainty of the Christian religion, since this resurrection is the seal which God annexed to the teachings of the Redeemer.

I confine myself at present to a single point. I propose to establish the truth of our religion by proving the resurrection of Christ, which is the most important and most wonderful of the facts which the scriptures record. The text affords me two decisive proofs: one is the testimony of the apostles; the other is the testimony of the Holy Ghost. The first of these we shall illustrate in this discourse. "We are witnesses," says St. Peter, "of the resurrection of Jesus, and so also is the Holy Ghost, whom God has given to them that obey him."

I. The first proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and consequently of the Christian religion, is the testimony that the apostles give to this miraculous event. 'We are witnesses of these things; of the resurrection of that Jesus whom ye have crucified. We do not know it merely by report; we are eye-witnesses; we ourselves have seen this risen Jesus; we have seen him many times; we have conversed with him; we have touched his body; we have attended him to the place where he left us, and seen him ascend into heaven. It is not only one of us who have seen him; we have all seen him, and the other apostles have

seen him as well as we. We are all witnesses of this miraculous resurrection : many others of his disciples, many women of his acquaintance, unite their testimony with ours. We can even mention, nearly five hundred persons who are still living, and who with their own eyes, have beheld this risen Saviour.' (1 Cor. xv. 6.)

This is the testimony which the apostles give to the resurrection of Christ. We must receive this testimony unless we maintain one of these two things : either that all these witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, were themselves deceived when they supposed that they saw Jesus risen ; or else that they agreed to deceive others, by falsely pretending to be eye-witnesses of a thing which none of them ever saw.

The first of these things must be acknowledged to be impossible, if we reflect but a single moment, who were these eye-witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They were all persons who had frequently seen him ; and who regarding him as an extraordinary character, had attentively considered him. They were even the most intimate friends of Christ, his disciples, who, during many years, had continually been with him ; who had very lately eaten the passover, and celebrated the holy supper with him ; who had passed the night with him in the garden, and accompanied him to the place where he was taken by his enemies. To say that these were all deceived, when they supposed that they saw Jesus Christ risen from the dead, we must maintain that they had lost entirely, and all at the same time, every idea of their Master ; that in three days, they had all forgotten what were the traits of his countenance, what his appear-



ance, his voice, and every thing which distinguishes one person from another.

Still this would be more possible, if they had said that they saw him but once. But no; they witnessed that this risen Jesus showed himself to them numerous times: sometimes to one of them in particular; sometimes to many together; sometimes to all at once; sometimes in one place, and sometimes in another; that he has allowed them even to handle his body and touch his wounds, to assure the most incredulous that he was the same Jesus who expired upon the cross. Besides, Jesus Christ was not content to show himself to his disciples one moment here and another moment there; he remained a long time with them, travelled and ate with them, held different conversations with them, gave different instructions to them, and made them many promises; and before he quitted them, instituted the solemn ordinance of baptism. Is it possible that the disciples, the intimate friends of Jesus Christ, could mistake their Master whilst he did, said, and instituted these things? Is it possible that the force of imagination could so far enchant the senses of so many men, and for so long a time, and upon so many several occasions, as to possess them with a belief that they saw a person alive who had been dead; a person with whom they had been intimately acquainted; and that they felt the substance of his flesh and bones, and conversed with him, when there was really no such thing nor nothing like it? Most certainly not. It is then evident that the witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ could not themselves be deceived.

An infidel, then, to reject this testimony, must maintain that these witnesses agreed among themselves to deceive others. This is the only entrench-

ment which the unbeliever can have, after we have proved that they themselves could not be deceived. But I will show you clearly, that such a suspicion is,

I. Without any foundation.

II. That this suspicion is totally improbable. And,

III. That it is a suspicion entirely false and unreasonable.

1. I say such a suspicion *is without foundation*. To accuse a person of fraud with any foundation, we must observe in him some mark of imposture, or be convinced that he has acted deceitfully on other occasions. But nothing of this nature has ever been proved against either the apostles or the other witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, although it was the highest interest of the enemies of christianity to make these witnesses pass for impostors. There is, then, no foundation to suspect their fidelity.

2. This suspicion is *entirely improbable*. If those who first preached the resurrection of Jesus Christ had done it to establish an impure or impious worship, infidels would have reason to doubt of the truth of this resurrection. But on the contrary, the religion which the apostles and their disciples laboured to found, by preaching the resurrection of its author, is of all religions which have ever been in the world, the most pure, the most holy, the most worthy of the Divinity. This is granted by all reasonable and candid infidels. In truth, if there ever have been men in this world who have served God in a manner worthy of him, we may confidently say that Christians are these men: I mean real Christians, who have embraced with all their heart the holy doctrine of Christ; who have trusted in his promises, and have laboured to practise the commands and to imitate the example of their Master: certainly these have

been the true servants, the real worshippers of God, or he never had any upon the earth. Now then the question recurs, who has established in the world this excellent and pure worship of Christians? Is God himself the author of it; or did some shameful impostors give currency to it by falsehood and lies? If what the gospel tells us of the resurrection of Jesus Christ be true, the case is decided: it is God himself who has introduced the Christian religion. If what the gospel tells us of this resurrection be a fable, we must say that some ignorant unenlightened fishermen have caused the most holy of all religions to be received in the world; that it is to the fraud and imposture of these uninstructed men that God is indebted for it, if he has ever been served in a manner worthy of him. Is not this reflection alone sufficient to show that every suspicion against the fidelity of the apostles is improbable?

3. But if this is evident from considering the doctrine that these witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ would confirm by their testimony, it is no less evident from considering in themselves these witnesses and the witness which they give.

To accuse these witnesses of fraud, we must not only say that they have lied, but that they have lied for nothing, and without hoping for any benefit from it. Who can believe this? Who can suppose that they would utter a falsehood which was at once most criminal and most dangerous; which brought down upon them the greatest miseries, and exposed them to a shameful death? What could these persons seek in inventing and uttering so strange a fable? This was not the way to arrive at honours, to amass riches, to procure the pleasures and enjoyments of this world. On the contrary, it was necessary for

them to forego all these advantages, and expose themselves to the contempt of the world, to severe persecutions, to a thousand woes and miseries. What object could they possibly have in asserting that Christ was risen, if he still was in the tomb?

Another reason which proves that it is against all probability to suspect the faithfulness of those who testify the resurrection of Jesus, is this: by forming such a suspicion we suppose that these witnesses attested a most criminal and most dangerous falsehood, not with a design to obtain any profit or glory for themselves, but in favour of another, in favour of a dead person, in favour of a dead person who had horribly deceived them for many years. The apostles attached themselves to Jesus Christ because they supposed him the Messiah promised to the people of God. They had quitted all to follow him. They had experienced with him many afflictions, had suffered the contempt of the world, reproach, and poverty. They hoped to be richly recompensed for this in the kingdom of this Messiah which they expected. When Jesus Christ died upon the cross, they were afflicted and terrified. There was, however, still one resource. Jesus Christ had promised that he should rise again the third day; but if that had not happened, we may easily imagine what would have been the sentiments of these apostles. They would have been convinced that this Jesus whom they had so long followed, for whom they had forsaken all, was but an impostor, who had amused them with vain hopes, who had deceived them in a shameful manner, who had exposed them to the contempt and hatred of the world, who had cast them into poverty and the extremity of misery. Could the memory of such a man be dear to them? Who can

believe that for his sake they would have invented the most dangerous of all falsehoods, and that they would have maintained this falsehood with so much constancy in the midst of the greatest afflictions which they had to experience and to apprehend because of it? Is there in this supposition the least probability?

I add a third reason which proves that it is entirely improbable that these witnesses of the resurrection attempted to deceive the world; it is this: none of them could hope that their fraud would succeed, if their report had been fraudulent. It was a strange design to make the world believe, that a criminal who died upon the cross, and was buried, had recovered his life three days afterwards. The apostles must have felt every moment that they did not possess talents to persuade the world of a thing so incredible, and to conduct an enterprise so dangerous. But besides, none of them could confide in the others, who must necessarily be of the plot; and as no interest connected them together, each of them must every moment be apprehensive that he would be betrayed by some one of his companions who might either be gained or frightened. And certainly if such people as the apostles had been a company of impostors, it would have been a real miracle if so many powerful enemies of Christianity, who held in their hands punishments and rewards, had found no means to destroy a plot so miserably concerted. What would have been more easy than to seduce one of these people by promises or benefits, to intimidate another by threats and violence, and even to constrain some of them by torments to confess the truth?

These observations clearly prove, that any suspicion of an intention in the apostles to deceive is not only without foundation, but is besides contrary to all probability. But even supposing that a suspicion could be formed against them with some foundation and some probability, these reflections that we are about to add would entirely destroy it.

If we had a presumption sufficiently strong against the fidelity of a witness, would it not be sufficient to destroy this presumption, if this witness showed all the world by an irreproachable life, by an exemplary piety, by a constant holiness, that he was not a man capable of giving false witness? Would it not be sufficient, if besides, this witness should suffer with much constancy the greatest afflictions, the most dreadful torments, to support his testimony; if finally he should seal this witness with his blood? Now this is what the witnesses of the resurrection of Christ have done.

They have *first* supported their testimony by a holy life and an exemplary piety. We may be assured of this by the testimony even of their enemies, who have confessed that their morals were irreproachable. We may be assured of it by reading their writings, which every where breathe sincerity, charity, humility, renunciation of the world, love to God and a zeal for his glory. We may be assured of it by considering with what warmth they press their holy morality; what a fervent desire and holy anxiety they have for the conversion and sanctification of all men; if we reflect with what boldness they tell their hearers to be followers of them, as they also are followers of Christ. We may be assured of this piety of the apostles, by the wonderful efficacy of their preaching, by the astonishing num-

ber of conversions under their ministry ; which would have been impossible had not their preaching been accompanied with extraordinary holiness of life. We may be assured of it by the testimony of their disciples, whose writings we still possess, who like their teachers were holy men, and who suffered martyrdom for the truths which they learned of these apostolic martyrs. Is it possible to suspect such men of a fraud, as impious as theirs would have been, if they themselves had invented what they testified of the resurrection of Christ ?

But if the witnesses of this resurrection have proved their sincerity by the holiness of their lives, they have proved it still more clearly by what they suffered to support the truth of their testimony. I know that martyrdom is not a decisive proof of the truth of the doctrines which the martyr maintains, and that it is possible for a man to suffer martyrdom for a false doctrine : but at least martyrdom is a certain proof of the sincerity of him who suffers it : I believe even that it is the strongest proof which can be given. We may take a falsehood for a truth ; we may be so convinced of it as to suffer great torments for this pretended truth : but it is incredible that we should suffer the severest tortures for a falsehood which we know in our conscience to be a falsehood. But nevertheless, we must say that this was done by the apostles, if they were impostors. I have not time, my brethren, to show you the great number and the severity of the torments to which the first preachers of the gospel and their immediate successors were exposed. I will only remark, that they suffered these persecutions voluntarily, and because of the testimony which they gave to Christ. They foresaw all that they would have to encounter

in preaching his resurrection. They saw on the other hand that they would avoid all these calamities by remaining silent. They saw even that after they had begun to preach the gospel, they could still elude these miseries by going over to the enemies of Christianity. They even might expect great rewards if they would abandon their companions, and forsake the cause in which they were engaged. Yet notwithstanding all this, they announce every where the resurrection of Christ; they love better to expose themselves to a thousand woes than to deny or conceal this point; they love better to lay down their lives, to expire in the acutest agonies, than to cease their testimony. Surely there is nothing but the force of truth, of truth with which he is intimately affected, that can push forward a man to so extraordinary a resolution, and encourage him to sustain it with so wonderful a constancy.

You see then, my brethren, that the testimony of the apostles is unexceptionable; that neither their knowledge of the matter they attested, nor their fidelity in attesting it, can be called in question without the most monstrous absurdity. We may confidently challenge infidels to mention a single one of those historical facts which no man of sense has ever called in question, that has better witnesses than the resurrection of Christ. We may boldly assert that a person who would reject such testimony in any thing except religion, would be accused by all the world of blindness and folly.

Perhaps some of you have thought that we have already spent too much time upon this argument. Perhaps some of you are inwardly saying, 'Why need all these reasonings be employed to demonstrate a



thing which none of us disputes? we are all Christians; we have never doubted of the resurrection of Christ, nor of the other truths of the gospel. I grant, my brethren, that if a person look only at our outward worship, and observe us constantly attending the courts of the Lord, he would suppose that we were fully persuaded of the truths of religion. But let us not deceive ourselves; all this may be performed, whilst the heart is unbelieving. What, then, must we do, to prove the sincerity of our faith? Is it necessary that we suffer some great affliction for the cause of Christ? Is it necessary that we seal with our blood the sincerity of our profession? No, my brethren, God does not now call us to so severe a test. What he requires of us as a proof of our sincerity, is only a life conformed to our belief. "Show," says he by the mouth of his apostle, "show your faith by your works." This is what must prove that we are truly persuaded of these truths. Our lives must evince that we believe that Christ is risen from the dead; that, therefore, the doctrine which he taught is true; that, therefore, there will be a judgment for all men, a heaven for the righteous, a hell for the wicked. We vainly boast of our faith, if our whole conduct does not prove that we are truly convinced of these important doctrines.

But, alas! my brethren, if nothing but a Christian life can show the sincerity of our faith, if all other marks are equivocal, how many unbelievers are there who bear the name of Christians? What must we say of so many open and profligate sinners, whose whole lives are a perpetual violation of the law of God?

Let us conclude this discourse by considering the resurrection of Christ as a pledge of the resurrec-

tion and happiness of believers, and as a source of abundant consolations.

1. The resurrection of Christ is an assured pledge of the resurrection and subsequent happiness of believers. All mankind must sink under the stroke of death. Our friends, our neighbours, are falling around us, under the arm of this destroyer. Our turn must shortly arrive; in a little while the dust of the church-yard must press upon our cold and unpalpitating breasts. When once deposited in the tomb, no philosopher has sufficient wisdom, no prince sufficient power, to restore us to light and life. But when human help fails, the Son of God exclaims, "Believe in me, become my disciple, and I will raise you to an immortal life; though you were dead, yet shall you live."

His own resurrection is a proof of this promise, since *this resurrection shows that there is no natural or moral impossibility in our restoration to life.* For, since Jesus by the power which he received from the Father, raised his own dead body from the tomb, and clothed it with glory, and bore it to the heavens, we cannot doubt that he is able to raise and to glorify us also. And as to the moral impossibility of our resurrection, that is, the impossibility which springs, not from want of power in God to produce such an effect, but from the resistance which reason and justice would oppose to it, the resurrection of Christ has satisfied us on this point also. For this moral impossibility would be caused only by our sin; but the resurrection of Christ has shown that our sin is expiated and justice satisfied. For since the Father has restored him from a death which he suffered only for our crimes; since he has raised him from the tomb, which he entered only for our offences; since

he has delivered him from a prison in which he was cast only for our debts; since on raising him from this death, from this tomb, from this prison, he has crowned him with glory; he has thereby declared that he is well pleased with his obedience, and has accepted from him, our Mediator and Surety, an atonement for our sins. Our guilt then, will not prevent him from employing in our behalf, his almighty power.

2. But besides these considerations, we are, from the resurrection of Christ, assured of our own resurrection, because he rose from the dead, and *took possession of heaven* not merely for himself, but in the name and in behalf of believers. For all those who believe in him are so closely united to him, as to be esteemed one body with him, of which he is the head and they the members. Therefore they are said to be predestinated to be conformed to his image, and he is declared to be the first fruits of them that slept; and we are said to be raised together with him.

Be of good cheer, then, believers. Your Redeemer liveth. Death, who cries to the wicked, ‘Fools, quit your enjoyments, your pleasures, your Gods!’ will accost you in accents of tenderness, and say, ‘Faithful servants, the period of your anxieties, your griefs, and your tears is ended. Your Saviour calls you. Go, enjoy heaven and your Redeemer. Tremble not to consign your body to the dust: Jesus will watch its scattered particles.’

Since God has deigned to assure such blessings to us; since not satisfied with shielding our souls from the inflictions of justice, he has also provided for our bodies such inconceivable glories, let us live in a

manner worthy of this new and immortal nature. Let us obey the injunction of the apostle, "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above."

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## SERMON LXIII.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XXX.



CHRIST'S INTERVIEW WITH MARY AT THE SEPULCHRE.

JOHN XX. 11—17.

How interesting, as a writer, as well as a man, is the disciple whom Jesus loved! In reading his writings, we must be taught, by the powerful impulse of feeling, that there never was a heart of greater tenderness and sensibility, more deeply penetrated with that charity, that love to God and man, which forms the soul of the religion which the Saviour announced, and of which John was so worthy a preacher. All his gospel breathes his spirit. It appears to have been written only to inspire it. His favourite principles are those which tend to establish it. To show the excellence and the necessity of it, he employs the most forcible reasonings, the most eloquent figures, the most impressive images, the most striking examples. Those facts which have been slightly mentioned by

the other Evangelists, are fully developed by him in all their circumstances, when they are calculated to show us the nature of Christian love, to offer us a model of it, or to inspire us with a taste for it.

We see an illustration of these observations in that portion of history which has been read to you. Mark merely tells us, that Mary Magdalene was the first to whom our Saviour appeared after his resurrection. But the tenderness of this interview; the profound, persevering, and sublime emotions of love which Mary displayed towards the Redeemer; emotions which survived the destruction even of her hopes, and which led her to the tomb of her Master, to pay to him the last duties of affection, and to enjoy there the sad consolation of weeping for her loss; and the gracious conduct and language of the Redeemer; all these circumstances were so accordant with the feelings of John, that he could not avoid giving in detail this history, so interesting to believers.

Let us briefly review it, and deduce from it some practical lessons.

You recollect, by brethren, that Mary Magdalene, (who must be distinguished from Mary the sister of Lazarus, and from that woman who was a sinner, mentioned by Luke, and with whom she has sometimes been improperly confounded,) you recollect that she came early in the morning, with other pious women, to embalm the body of Jesus. Perceiving the stone rolled away, and the sepulchre open, she supposed that his body had been taken from the tomb. Under this impression, she went to inform Peter and John, who hastened to the sepulchre, and, entering into it, found only the cloths which had covered the body of the Redeemer. Supposing her

apprehensions true, they returned home. But Mary, agitated and unquiet, full of doubts and perplexities, "stood without at the sepulchre, weeping;" still reluctant to quit a place where she had seen the body of Jesus deposited, hoping, perhaps, that some one would bring her tidings of her beloved Saviour, and pouring her tears over the tomb of him whom she believes to be a second time in the hands of his enemies. It is thus that Reuben, not finding Joseph in the pit into which his brethren had cast him, rends his garments, supposing him to be destroyed; or rather it is thus that Jacob, seeing the bloody robe of Joseph, and not doubting that a wild beast has devoured him, sheds tears of anguish, and declares that he will go down with sorrow to the grave. But Joseph is alive; he shall dry the tears of his father, and be the benefactor and preserver of his brethren. Jesus is alive, and shall pour consolation into the wounded soul of Mary.

Still continuing to weep, and unwilling entirely to abandon her hopes, she stoops down, and looks wishfully into the sepulchre. Perhaps she heard some sound proceeding from it, some words there spoken by the blessed messengers of heaven; perhaps she hoped that she had been deceived in her former examination, and that new researches might be more favourable. She beholds there two angels clothed in white, the emblem of purity and innocencé. When they first appeared to roll away the stone from the sepulchre, "their countenance was like lightning," and filled with terror and apprehension the guards that surrounded the tomb. Though "their garments" still "are white as snow," yet their aspect is mild and gracious, and their address full of tenderness.

They are seated, "the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain." Thus they appeared like the two cherubim in the holy of holies, at the extremities of the ark, and over the propitiation or mercy-seat, and teach us that the Lord, by his death, is the true propitiation for the sins of the world. Ministers of the God of peace in the resurrection of Jesus, they do not immediately leave his sepulchre, but remain there, till their presence has taught believers, that as they have opened *his* tomb, so they will hereafter open *theirs*, that they, like their Redeemer, may proceed from it alive. Worshippers of the Redeemer, they come to pay a visible honour to him, and to place themselves there, where that body had lain, which had lately been crucified between two thieves.

With tenderness they cry to Mary, "Woman, why weepest thou?" 'Instead of shedding tears, it is a season for joy. If Jesus were still in the tomb, thou wouldst have reason to weep, since all thy hopes must then be lost. But he has now triumphed over the grave; has conquered his enemies and thine; and we are here to announce his victory.' "Woman, why weepest thou?"

Mary, still persuaded that the body of her Lord had been taken away, and perhaps suspecting these two persons whom she saw in the grave as having done it, replied, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him;" 'to render to him those offices which his virtues and his blessings have so well merited from me.'

Mary had no sooner pronounced these words, than she turned herself back, and "saw Jesus standing" near her. But not expecting to behold him there, and her eyes dimmed with tears, and her soul so ab-

sorbed with grief, as to give her neither leisure nor inclination to examine external objects, she knew not that it was Jesus.

He proposes to her the same question as did the angels: "Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?" She, supposing that he cannot be ignorant of the cause of her tears, and the object of her search, does not directly reply to these questions; but supposing it to be the gardener, and that he was able to give her the information which she desired, exclaims, "If thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away."

Jesus, touched by her excess of grief, replied to her only by naming her; but without doubt he pronounced her name with a voice so tender and affecting, that Mary no longer could fail to recognise him; and those sweet sounds, so familiar to her ears, so profoundly engraven on her soul, instantly banished her grief. "She turned herself," (an expression which shows she had not hitherto fixedly viewed him,) "and cried to him, Rabboni, O my Master!" Who can properly express her rapture? Ye who, after a long and painful separation, have been re-united to those whom you love; ye who have seen a parent, a consort, or friend, whom disease conducted to the borders of the grave, and for whose loss you already wept, unexpectedly recalled to life, and restored to you; ye whose tears have flowed for one dear to you, whose death had been falsely announced, but who suddenly re-appearing before you, changed your mourning into joy; recall those moments, retrace the emotions which you then felt, and you will have a feeble, ah! how feeble a conception of the joys which now swelled the heart of Mary! No wonder



that, in a transport of joy, of wonder, and of the most tender affection, she should only cry, "Rabboni, O my Master!" No wonder that she cast herself at the feet of Jesus, to embrace them!

"Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not." Do not now stay to express your affection to me; "for I am not yet ascended to my Father;" or, as the original had better be translated, "I do not yet ascend to my Father." I shall still sojourn some time upon earth, and you will have many opportunities of seeing me again. "But go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, unto my God and your God." O blessed Jesus! what heart can be so hard as not to glow at this display of thy grace, thy forgiveness, thy goodness to those who have rendered themselves unworthy of thy favours! For who, my brethren, are those to whom the Saviour hastens to send the news of his resurrection? For whose consolation he checks the transports of a heart so devoted to him? To whom he gives the name of brethren? It is a disciple who has denied him thrice with execration; they are timid men who dared not accompany him before his judges; ungrateful followers, who, with the exception of one only, fled from the last scenes of woe! When they were chosen by him, he termed them *apostles*, or ministers sent out by him; when he was about to leave the earth, he called them *friends*: but now that all power is given to him in heaven and on earth, he addresses them as *brethren*. Ah! if it had been possible for Mary to have forgotten the Saviour's voice, or his appearance, she must instantly have recalled him from these expressions of tenderness and love, which so strongly characterize the gracious Immanuel, "Go to my *brethren*."

Nothing is more grand, more precious than the news to be announced to them. "I ascend to my Father," he who is so by nature; "and to their Father," by adoption and grace: "To my God," in covenant with me as their head, and "to their God," in covenant with them through me and under me. Words which at once show the triumph of Jesus Christ, and the triumph of the Christian. Let us illustrate these two ideas.

1. It was the triumph of Jesus Christ, and removed the scandal of the cross. When the Saviour expired, his disciples were filled with astonishment and consternation. All their hopes died with him upon the cross; and they could not reconcile his ignominy and sufferings with the character of the deliverer of Israel. But scarcely have they time to reflect upon this event, which prostrated their hopes, before the resurrection of their Master, and the glory which followed it, is announced to them. Their eyes immediately are opened; those prejudices concerning a temporal kingdom and a worldly glory of Messiah, to which they so pertinaciously clung, were abandoned; and the rays of glory, with which Jesus was encircled in springing from the tomb, shed upon his person, his doctrine, his ministry, the nature and extent of his mission, a light which directs and cheers the apostles. They now comprehend what before they could not conceive, that his kingdom is not of this world; that it extends to all ages; that it is to be exercised from heaven; that he will re-descend only to judge the world; and that, "having been declared the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead, he has thus received a name which is above every name." (Rom. i. 4. Phil. ii. 9, 10, 11.) Here they see the accomplishment of the predictions of the ancient prophets, and the splendid terms in

which they spoke of the triumphs of Messiah. Here was explained that mystery hitherto covered with darkness to them, of the humiliation, the sufferings, and death of the Son of God. Here was understood by them in all its extent, the prayer of Jesus ready to expire: "And now, O Father, glorify thy Son with the glory which I had with thee before the foundation of the world." Yes, if Christ crucified, was for a short time a cause of triumph to his enemies, of perplexity and grief to his disciples, Christ risen becomes a cause of confusion to these enemies, and of joy to these disciples. "If thou be the Son of God," said the blinded Jews when insulting him, "come down from the cross." Jesus did more: he came alive from the tomb; and this miracle of divine power is only the first step of that elevation into which he is entering; the first ray of that glory which he is about to enjoy in the bosom of *his Father*; the first degree of that supreme grandeur, with which *his God*, who is not the God of the dead, but of the living, is about to crown him, in "making him sit at his right hand in heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your father, and unto my God and your God." This is then the triumph of Christ.

2. It is also a source of the richest consolation and trust to all believers.

"I would wish this text," says the excellent Baxter, "written on my dying bed; I would wish to view it with my closing eyes, that I might exult in the agonies of dissolution." Ah! Christians, never forget it! Engrave it on your minds and hearts in in-

effable characters ; it is a firm warrant for the sublimest hopes ; a pledge of the highest elevation. And let it also be your *rule* in all your conduct ; your *consolation* in your trials ; your *trust* in the most disastrous situations.

If the Father of Jesus Christ is your Father and your God, always listen with docility to a voice at once so august and tender ; follow the glorious example of the “ first-born among many brethren,” who has given you a model of the most perfect obedience ; and strive to be able to say with him in your closing moments, ‘ O my Father, my God,’ “ I have glorified thee on earth ; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”

If the Father of Jesus Christ is your Father and your God, submit with an entire resignation to all the dispensations of Providence, as Jesus submitted to them. Let us suffer like him, that we may reign with him ; and convinced that the will of our Father is always wise and good, if the weakness of our nature should make us for a moment cry, “ Father, let this cup pass from me without my drinking it,” let us instantly add, “ Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done ;” firmly convinced that “ all things work together for good to those that love God ;” and that our trials will tend to honour and glory when Jesus shall be manifested.

If the Father of Jesus Christ is your God and Father, then let this tender assurance augment your faith, your love, your detachment from the world. Yes, believers, intimately united to Jesus Christ by the bonds of the truest and tenderest love, regarding him as your brother and your Saviour, you shall participate in his glory, after participating in his sufferings. “ Sealed with the seal of this adoption,”

which permits you to regard God as your Father ; regenerated by the Holy Spirit, “ heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.” Your country is in the heavens, where Jesus has preceded you only to prepare mansions for you. It is there that, united for ever to him, you shall enjoy in all their plenitude the delights of that love which you imperfectly understand below. How calculated is this hope to support us in the midst of trials and temptations, in the midst of the vicissitudes of life, and in the arms of death itself! Ah! when is it that we shall have sentiments and a conduct conformed to this hope; that, no longer fascinated by earth, our hearts shall ascend with our ascended Saviour? Then, after having with Mary here below wept his absence, groaned at the interval which separates us from him, laboured to sanctify it by communion with him, we shall with joy perceive the moment of our dissolution approach ; we shall with transport behold that tomb opening for us, which shall confine for a short time our mortal and corruptible bodies, only to restore them like his, incorruptible and immortal ; then, resting in his embraces, our hearts overflowing with gratitude, we shall feel the full force of these words : “ I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and unto my God and your God.”

Is there here any dejected and humble penitent that can derive no consolation from these words ; that, pressed down under a sense of sin, fears that the Saviour will never be found by him ; that, like Mary, is bitterly weeping, and seeking Jesus ? Be of good cheer, thou “ tossed with tempest,” and “ not comforted ;” Jesus is near thee, though thou perceivest him not ; he marks thy tears, he listens to thy groans, he sees thy penitential sorrow ; and he

will *surely*, he may *suddenly*, he may on this very occasion, manifest himself to thee, speak to thee the accents of peace, and, like Mary, change thy tears into rapture. Though thou standest before the seat of Christ, as the brethren of Joseph before this patriarch, not perceiving his affection and fearing his anger, yet he shall soon cry to thee, not "I am Joseph, thy brother," but, 'I am Christ, thine elder brother, thy Lord and thy Redeemer.'

And you who never have been affected by the love of the Redeemer, and never have felt the power of his resurrection; who, though you are assured that this Redeemer liveth, and know where to seek him if you would find him, yet continue contentedly without him, we pity your folly, we tremble at your guilt. Ah! the time is rapidly coming, when you shall feel the infinite value of their privilege who can regard the Almighty as their God and Father reconciled in Christ. In imagination place yourselves on the bed of death, at that middle point between time and eternity, which you must shortly reach; your acquaintance stand silent and gloomy around your couch, watching each fresh symptom of danger, and feeling a chill on their blood and spirits as they mark death approaching, and you unprepared. But in vain are their prayers and tears; your eyes swim; your tongue falters; a cold sweat bedews your face; you groan; death drives his arrow deep into your heart; you expire; and your soul, red with unexpiated guilt, falls before the throne, not of a reconciled Father, but of an offended Judge; not of a covenant God, but of the tremendous Jehovah, armed with thunders to avenge your violations of his law, and your contempt of his Son!

## SERMON LXIV.



LIFE OF CHRIST.

No. XXXI.



ASCENSION.

LUKE XXIV. 51.

*And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and taken up into heaven.*

JESUS CHRIST having paid the ransom for our sins upon the cross, and having sanctified the grave for his followers by his residence in it, departed from this world and ascended to his Father. He thus ascended that he might discharge more fully his mediatorial offices of king, priest, and prophet, of his people. Since his *kingdom* was not earthly and temporal, but spiritual and heavenly; since it was not limited but extended to all creatures, it was proper that he should ascend to the highest heaven in order to exercise it. And there he is seated, king over all things, and the head of his church, governing and directing the universe, and managing the concerns of his people. As a *priest*, he had offered up himself a sacrifice in our stead, and satisfied divine justice. But still it was necessary for him to ascend to heaven, there to present the sacrifice of Calvary,

and to intercede for us. As our *prophet*, he had instructed man in the will of God, but much still remained to be revealed by the Holy Ghost, who, according to the divine purposes, could not be sent till after Christ's ascension. "It is expedient for you," said he to his disciples, "that I go away, for if I go not away the Holy Spirit will not come unto you." His mission was reserved as the reward of the Saviour's obedience, as the effect of his intercession above, as the consequence of his triumph, as the evidence of the power and glory which he possessed in heaven. It was necessary that Christ should ascend, that he might receive the reward of his sufferings and humiliation. "He humbled himself," says St. Paul, "and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name that is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth." It was necessary that Jesus should ascend to heaven, to take possession of it for his followers, and there to prepare mansions for them. This reason he more than once assigns; and his apostle assures us that he entered not in his own name only, but as our forerunner and harbinger. It was necessary that he should ascend into heaven, that our love, our faith, our worship, might be pure and spiritual. Had he remained on earth, our love would have been mingled with animal affection, our faith would have had no opportunity of exercise, our worship would have been interrupted by familiar intercourse with him. But now that he has left the earth, our love becomes more spiritual, we have an opportunity to attain the blessedness of those who having not seen have be-



lieved, and our worship is correspondent with his high elevation: that he might fulfil the ancient prophecies, which declared that "he should ascend on high, and lead captivity captive:" that "the everlasting doors should be unfolded to receive this King of glory, this Lord strong and mighty." To accomplish the ancient types, this spiritual Joseph rose from the prison of the grave to the highest dignity and glory; this nobler David, after all his afflictions and trials, quietly possessed his crown; this great high-priest entered into the holiest with the blood which he had shed. For these and similar reasons Jesus ascended into heaven.

The time, the place, the witnesses, the circumstances of his ascension, all are calculated to interest and instruct us.

Having broken the bonds of death, and risen triumphant from the grave, he did not *immediately* ascend to his native heaven, and take possession of that glory which he had with the Father before the foundation of the world. Seeking not his own glory, but man's felicity, he would not return to the bosom of his Father, and the adoration of the celestial host, till he had confirmed the faith of his disciples, that had been shaken by his sufferings; till he had prepared them for his departure; till he had given to mankind the most incontestable proofs of his resurrection. Forty days therefore he remained on earth showing himself to his followers, filling up this last period of his residence below with acts of mercy and kindness; consoling, animating, and instructing his disciples; and "speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

Imitate his example, Christian parent! When you like your Saviour are about to leave those committed

to your charge, when you are about to pass from earth to heaven, seize with avidity the few moments that remain to you to direct, animate, and instruct those that you leave behind you. Think it not sufficient to have your heart filled with joy at the prospect of celestial felicity: speak also of this felicity to those whom you leave on earth, and whom you wish to follow you into the kingdom of your Father.

The *place* selected by the Saviour for his triumphant ascension was the mount of Olives. This place had been consecrated by the instructions and the prayers of Jesus. From it he had dispensed his heavenly doctrines to the people; to it he often retired after the labours of the day; and on it spent the wakeful night pouring out his petitions to his Father. By ascending from it he shows that he was authorized by God to give these instructions; that these prayers had been heard and answered by his Father. This mountain had been the theatre of his sufferings. Its ground had smoked with the blood which gushed from every pore of his agonized frame. It now is the theatre of his glory; the witness of his elevation. What place then could have been selected better calculated to instruct the apostles? In the afflictions of Jesus upon Olivet they saw an image of those which they would be called to endure. But in the ascension of Jesus from Olivet they saw the glory to which these afflictions would conduct them, and they resolutely prepared to encounter them. What place could have been selected more calculated to console thee, suffering believer? Behold Jesus on this mountain pouring forth strong cries and tears, and exclaiming, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death!" Can any thing exceed his misery? Behold Jesus rising from this mountain

to the throne of heaven, and acknowledge that "Blessed are those that weep, since they shall be comforted."

This ascension took place while he was "lifting up his hands on his disciples and blessing them." How admirably does this last act of the Saviour correspond with the whole course of his life! When he entered into the world, angels formed wishes for the happiness of man: when he leaves the world *he* forms wishes for the happiness of his disciples. He was born, he lived, he died, he ascended into heaven for the happiness of man. Truly does the apostle say, "God sent him to bless us."

We know not the words that our Lord used on this occasion; but we know that they must have been most tender and affecting. The kindest friend, the most affectionate father, never could conceive that love which Jesus entertained for his disciples: in what moving language then must he have told them all that he felt for them, all that he asked of God in their behalf. He blessed them, and what more precious legacy could he bestow on them? Unlike the impotent good wishes of our fellow men, his benediction is always efficacious. It is the greatest of treasures; it is the source of infinite and eternal felicity. By it, heaven was opened to the apostles, and the earth subjected to them. By it they were enabled to suspend the laws of nature, and perform the most stupendous miracles. It was their buckler, defending them from all the assaults of their enemies. It was their sword, by which they subdued the world to the obedience of faith.

To give greater solemnity to this benediction, the Saviour accompanied it with a ceremony used among the Jews. "*He lifted up his hands* on his disciples,

and blessed them." It was customary with the Jews, when a single person only was to be blest, to place their hands upon his head; but when there were many, the hands of him pronouncing the blessing were elevated over them. Thus Aaron lifted up his hands upon the people and blessed them: thus Jesus lifted up his hands upon his disciples, and blessed them.

"And it came to pass," continues the Evangelist, "that as he was yet blessing them, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight." Under the Mosaic dispensation, the prophet Elijah was honoured by being carried up into heaven. But he ascended in a manner suited to the dispensation of terror under which he lived, and to his office, which was to announce the vengeance and draw down the punishments of God upon the guilty. He was carried up by a whirlwind into heaven, in a fiery chariot with horses of fire. But when Jesus Christ, the founder of a milder economy, whose office it had been to announce the divine grace and compassion; when he ascended, there was nothing terrible and appalling: every thing was mild, calm, and accordant with the character of him who "came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

Who can conceive the varied emotions which filled the breasts of the disciples as their eager and longing eyes followed the majestic ascension of their Lord? Surprise and admiration, gratitude and tenderness for his parting benediction, triumph and joy at the elevation of their Redeemer, grief and fear for their own desolate condition: these and a thousand other sentiments crowded at once upon their hearts. In the mean time Jesus ascends to his throne. Myriads of angels are his convoys and attendants. The

gates of heaven are lifted up, the everlasting doors are unfolded, and the King of Glory enters in! Shall I paint to you the acclamations that resound through the arch of heaven? Shall I show you your Saviour approaching the Eternal Throne, and saying, "Father, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do?" Shall I speak of the love and joy with which the Father received him? Alas! these are subjects which we can neither describe nor conceive.

But Jesus, seated on the throne of his glory, forgets not his disciples on earth. Two angels are missioned to console them: they present themselves clothed in white, the symbol of innocence and joy, and said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

Filled with joy, with zeal, with admiration, the disciples returned to Jerusalem, praising and glorifying God.

Such is a brief account of the ascension of the Saviour. Let us now consider what effect this doctrine should have on our sentiments and conduct.

1. In considering the ascension of our Saviour, *we should be filled with a holy joy.* How delightful is it to lift up our eyes, and behold him who for our sakes became the man of sorrows, now enjoying happiness ineffable! Him whose life on earth, from the manger to the cross, was one uninterrupted series of woes, removed infinitely beyond every affliction and pain! Him who was despised and rejected of men, worshipped and adored by the splendid host of heaven! Him whose head was pierced by the crown of thorns, now adorned with the crown of glory! Him in whose hand was placed the insulting reed, now wielding

the sceptre of the universe! Him who was hung up a naked spectacle on the cross, now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high! Christians, can you think of this without feeling your hearts overflow with joy? For you the Saviour descended from heaven; for you he experienced every pang that rends the human heart; for you he contended with sin, death, and hell; for you he conquered and triumphed over them: can you then fail to rejoice in his triumphs and elevation?

2. Jesus is ascended into heaven, and is possessed of all power. *What consolation does this thought afford to believers, amidst all the sorrows of life, and in their last struggle with death!* Can you be unhappy when you remember that the universe is governed by him who loved you so dearly as to lay down his life for your salvation? He has infinite mercy: may you not confide in him? He has almighty power: what enemy need you dread? He has a fellow-feeling of your distresses: for he was tempted in all points like as you are, and sympathizes in your griefs. Be of good cheer, then, under all the sorrows with which you may meet, and ever rejoice in your Almighty Protector. If men combat against you, he will defend you. If men strive to tear from you every joy, he will let down into your soul the consolations of heaven. And when you are struggling with death, remember that life separates you from your ascended Lord; that death will bear you to his embraces; and acknowledge that it is far better for you to drop this veil of flesh, which conceals from you the face and the glory of your Redeemer.

3. The ascension of Christ is admirably calculated to *strengthen and confirm our faith*. When we behold him rising refulgent from the holy mountain, can we

doubt of the efficacy of the sacrifice presented for us? can we hesitate in believing that it has fully satisfied the divine justice? Can we doubt that he came from God, and had the words of eternal life; that he is worthy of full belief and entire trust, when we see this illustrious testimony of God in his favour? Can we reject the instructions of him who, having spoken to us from earth, speaks now from heaven? Can we fear the accomplishment of the promises of him who has infinite power?

4. The ascension of Christ *animates our hope*. It was in the name of his followers that he ascended into heaven. There he intercedes for them; there he prepares for them an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. "In my Father's house," said he, "are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you." "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." Supported by this promise and this petition, believers may exult in hope of the glory of God.

5. The ascension of Christ should quicken and *enliven us in the exercises of devotion*. The sense of sin destroys our confidence towards God, and hinders our comfortable access to his throne. But when we consider an ascended Jesus presenting to the Father that blood which he shed upon earth, to procure for believers the pardon of their sins, and a freedom of access into his holy presence, we are encouraged to present our addresses with a holy boldness. "Seeing we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." "Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the

vail, that is to say, his flesh; and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

6. The ascension of Christ should *inspire us with heavenly affections and desires*, and make us live as citizens of heaven.

If he had intended that our affections should be centered on earth, he would have remained below; but now he commands us to have our conversation in heaven. And where else, believers, should your hearts be fixed? There is your treasure, your joy, your life; there is your true country; there your dearest friends. Ought not your thoughts and meditations then to be exalted thither? Ought you not to live above the world, and be continually meditating on the glory of your Saviour, on the bliss he is preparing for you? "If ye be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God; set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." Unloose your hearts from the earth, and let them soar to your Lord.

7. Finally: let us learn from his ascension *to prepare for his return*. This was the lesson taught by the angels themselves to the wondering disciples: "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go up into heaven." This promise consoled the apostles, dejected at the loss of their Master; and "they returned to Jerusalem," says St. Luke, "with great joy." My brethren, would not the angels be compelled to address us in a different manner? Would they not be forced



to say, not ‘Why gaze ye up into heaven?’ but, ‘Why are your eyes fixed upon the earth? Why do you think solely of the things of time? Why do not your affections rise above the clods on which you tread? Know you not that Jesus will come again upon the earth, to decide the destinies of men? Know you not that he will descend as he rose, with clouds for his chariot and angels for his attendants; receiving the righteous to his embraces, sentencing the impenitent to perdition? Tell me, my brethren, does the annunciation of these truths inspire you, as it did the disciples, with joy? Tell me, do you look with satisfaction to that day when your Judge shall assign to you the felicities of heaven or the agonies of hell? Are you prepared to stand before his bar? If you were told that even now he was approaching, would you not tremble at the destiny that awaits you? Awful reflection! that the presence of the Saviour, which forms heaven, which constitutes the felicity of angels and seraphs, which has supported martyrs amidst the most excruciating torments, should to you be an object of terror and dismay! In time then prepare to meet your Judge. Flee to the throne of his mercy, that you may not be blasted from the throne of his justice.

## SERMON LXV.



LIFE OF PAUL.

No. I.



ROMANS i. 1.

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ.*

FEW more illustrious men have lived than the apostle Paul. His natural powers of mind were great, and they were improved by the most diligent culture. In his writings we see a profound judgment, a lively imagination, an extensive acquaintance with literature. His speeches are animated with the fire of truth, and adorned with the arts of persuasion; but his virtues and his graces render him still more illustrious than his talents. What an ardent love to God and the Redeemer! what devotedness to the cause of truth! what an intrepid courage! what a firm trust in God! what a profound humility, and deep sense of the mercies he had received! what a warm and sincere charity for all men! what a tenderness of heart for all the churches—did he uniformly display! His life is intimately connected with the account of the first establishment of Christianity. I may then expect your attention, while in

this and some subsequent discourses I review his history.

This apostle was born at Tarsus, a city of Cilicia that was famous for its literature, and for an academy, which, according to Strabo, who lived in the same age with Paul, exceeded the celebrated institutions of Athens and Alexandria.\* Of the names of his parents we are ignorant; they were both, however, Jews. Whether they lived till after his conversion, and whether they persisted in their original belief, or were among the thousands who were brought to a knowledge of the truth by his ministry, we are not informed. Several of his relatives are mentioned in the New Testament. Andronicus, Junia, Herodion, Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, are in the sixteenth chapter of the Romans termed his kinsmen. Of the two first, he says that they "were in the Lord before him." He once viewed them as deluded enthusiasts; he afterwards took "sweet counsel with them." The others were probably brought to a knowledge of the Redeemer under his preaching. He had also a sister living at Jerusalem, whose son was of eminent service to him during his confinement in that city. (Acts xxiii. 16.)

He sprung from that tribe which occupied the next rank to that of Judah in the public estimation, the tribe descended from Jacob by his beloved Benjamin; that from which the first king was selected, and which remained faithful to God when all the rest, except Judah, bowed down to the idolatrous

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\* *Tantus Tarsensibus circa philosophiam amor fuit et alias disciplinas, quæ in orbiculatâ scientiarum serie versantur, ut Athenas et Alexandriam superarent; et si quis alius locus dici potest, in quo scholæ et exercitationes philosophiæ fuerint. Sed hoc uno plurimum excellit, quod hic indigenæ discunt; peregrini verò non multum huc adveniunt. At nec illi ipsi hic manent, et foris perficiuntur.*—STRABO, lib. xiv.

calves erected at Dan and Bethel. He was by his birth a Roman citizen, either, as some suppose, because Augustus granted to all the inhabitants of Tarsus the right of citizenship, in consequence of the attachment they had displayed to him during the civil wars; or, more probably, from a peculiar right that his father or his ancestors had acquired. As we prosecute his history, we shall see that this privilege was often of the greatest service to him.\*

He is called both *Saul* and *Paul*. Probably both these names were given him at his circumcision; the former as a Jew, the latter as a Roman citizen. He retained his Jewish name till he went to bear the gospel to the Gentiles. Others, however, have supposed that he took the name of Paul from the proconsul, *Sergius Paulus*, one of his first and most illustrious converts: the apostle, they think, like a conqueror, dresses himself in the spoils of the enemy he has subdued, and regarding this conversion as a happy omen for the future, assumes the name of the disciple he has made. It is certain at least that Luke does not give him the name of Paul till after this event.†

As he had high opportunities for the cultivation of polite literature in his native city, so he profited by them. His works show an acquaintance with

\* Those who embrace the latter sentiment maintain that Tarsus was only a free city, but not a Roman colony, in the time of Paul; that there is no proof from medals of its having been a colony before Caracalla or Heliogabalus.

† The second sentiment is maintained by *Origen* and *Jerome*. See them quoted in *Beausobre fils*. *Baronius* supposes that the proconsul wished as it were to receive him into his family, and desired him to assume the name of *Paul*, as his spiritual father. *Chrysostom*, *Theodoret*, and *Theophylast*, suppose that, from humility, he assumed the name of *Paul*, or *little*, at his ordination. This is improbable.

the Greek poets and philosophers, that was useful to him in the course of his ministry. Designed by the Lord for extensive benefit to the world, he was thus early preparing for it, unconsciously to himself; was acquiring that knowledge which he intended to direct against the cross of Jesus, but which should eventually be used in its support. If a Moses is designed to be the historian of the creation, the deliverer and the legislator of his people, Providence will cause him early to be instructed in all the learning of Egypt. If a Paul is to bear the gospel among the Gentiles, he shall early be adorned with their literature.

At a proper age he went up to Jerusalem to be instructed at that metropolis of Judea in Jewish literature, the traditions of the elders, and the received interpretations of the sacred books. There he was brought up under Gamaliel, one of the most celebrated teachers of that time. An instance of the moderation of this Rabbin is recorded in the Acts, (chap. 5.) When the Jewish councils, shortly after the ascension of our Redeemer, were about to murder the apostles, Gamaliel urged them to let the disciples alone, since if they were impostors, they would soon come to nought, as had lately been the case with Theudas and Judas of Galilee; but, if they were divinely missioned, opposition against them would be in vain, and would be "fighting against God." Saul was far from imitating the moderation of his teacher. Attaching himself to the sect of the pharisees, which was then most esteemed, he became a furious zealot; and laying an undue stress on the Jewish observances, supposing that by them, and by them only salvation could be attained, he regarded all Christians as blasphemers, to whom no mercy was

to be shown, and who were worthy of the severest tortures.

He is first introduced in the scriptures on the death of Stephen. When this holy man was martyred, (A. D. 33 or 34,) Saul, who had probably been present at his sermon, (Acts vi. 9,) "was consenting," or as the original word (*συνευδονων*) rather signifies, was highly pleased with his death. (viii. 1.) According to the law for the punishment of blasphemers, (under which accusation Stephen died,) the witnesses were to cast the first stones, (Deut. xvii. 7.) While they did this, they put their clothes at the feet of Saul, who thus proved himself an accomplice with them.

On the general persecution which followed the death of this proto-martyr, Saul distinguished himself by his fury, and became one of its most active ministers. "He made havock of the church, entering into every house, and dragging away men and women, committed them to prison." (viii. 3.) Unaffected by the delicacy of the female sex, whom the most barbarous soldiers respect, he made the most frightful ravages. He himself afterwards penitently laments that after the saints had been imprisoned by him, he gave his voice against them when they were put to death, and punished them in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme. (xx. 10, 11.) When he saw that, notwithstanding his violence and fury, Christianity was extended; that the blood of the martyrs then proved, as it always has done, the seed of the church; and that the disciples who were scattered abroad, planted the gospel in the places whither they were driven, he became still more exasperated. In the strong language of Luke, "He breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the

disciples of the Lord." (ix. 1.) Like a ferocious beast, who has devoured many innocent animals, he longs still for new prey. Hearing that many of the persecuted Christians had fled to Damascus, an ancient and celebrated city of Syria, and formerly its capital, (Isaiah vii. 8,) where they hoped to find protection from the pagan prince Aretas,\* he goes in pursuit of them, and representing them probably as apostates and disturbers of the public peace, resolves to bring them back to Jerusalem to punishment and death. The Romans had left to the sanhedrim the power of judging in all matters relating to religion, and the distant synagogues acknowledged its authority. Saul instead of waiting till a commission is given him, implores it as a favour from the high-priest and sanhedrim, (xxii. 5, xxvi. 12.) The high-priest, who was either Caiaphas or Jonathan his successor, but probably the former,† with joy complied with his request, and gave him letters to the numerous Jews at Damascus, that they might concur with him, and interest the civil powers in his behalf. Behold him then departing. Hatred, anger, a bitter zeal possess his soul. Yet he applauds himself; he thinks he is doing God service; he rejoices in this work of blood; he combats religion under the standard of religion itself. Even tyrants have wept at signing the sentences of criminals; but Saul feels no kindly relentings, and displays more the disposition of a fiend than of a man.

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\* This I think, is certain: but Scott says, it does not appear under whose authority Damascus now was.

† The conversion of Paul is supposed to have taken place A. D. 35. Caiaphas was deposed by Vitellius in this year, and succeeded by Jonathan, son of Ananus. Beausobre and L'Enfant say it was probably Matthias, but he was established by Agrippa in this office, in A. D. 41, and the conversion of Paul was long before.

Ah! who would have supposed that this most furious of persecutors would have become the most eminent of the apostles; that this ferocious lion would have been changed into a lamb; that, instead of going to distant cities to destroy the followers of Jesus, he should fly from country to country, holding up his cross as the ensign of salvation to the nations, and combat the obstinacy of the Jews, the blindness of the Gentiles, the false systems of the schools, and the pride of the great; that instead of shedding the blood of others, he should cheerfully pour out his own in defence of that faith which he now execrates? Such a change surely could be produced only by the omnipotence of grace.

Before we proceed further, let us here pause, and make some reflections on the character of Saul at this time. The manner in which he esteemed it, when he looked back upon it after his conversion, you well know. He termed himself "the chief of sinners, not meet to be called an apostle, because he persecuted the church of God; a persecutor, a blasphemer, and injurious." Nevertheless, *in other respects*, his morals were irreproachable; he was strict in the discharge of religious duties; "touching the righteousness that is of the law, he was blameless;" he acted in conformity to what he supposed was his duty, for he "verily thought he ought to do many things against the name of Jesus."

From his example, let us be led to deplore, to execrate, and to avoid a *cruel and blind zeal*. Though those who are animated by it suppose it a heavenly flame, it resembles the fire of hell; it is even more dangerous; for this burns only the criminal, while a blind zeal consumes all, innocent and guilty; and still persuades itself that it is offering to God accep-



table sacrifices. Zeal is necessary for the Christian: but it should be founded on a sincere love to God and man, attended by knowledge, be softened by tenderness and humanity, be regulated by prudence, abhorrent of cruelty. Without this, it is the source of a thousand crimes.

Let us learn, too, that the persuasion of the justice of an action is not sufficient of itself to justify it in the sight of God. Paul really supposed that he was complying with his duty, in persecuting those whom he falsely esteemed the enemies of God. Had his ignorance been involuntary, he had been excusable; but since he had not examined as he should the proofs of the divinity of Christianity, and since its rejection was founded on a corrupt temper of mind, he was not justified. Ah, my brethren! how different is the theology of Paul on this point from that of many in the present day! How many now maintain that it is indifferent what are our sentiments, and what our conduct, provided we are sincere! To follow a misguided conscience may lead us to destruction, as well as to resist an enlightened one.

Let us return to his history. Saul, fortified by letters from the high priest and sanhedrim, had now arrived near to Damascus. He was probably anticipating his triumphs, and plotting with his companions in what manner most successfully to execute his commission, and in anticipation feasting himself with the hope of exterminating these hated Christians; when, suddenly, a light far brighter than the sun, though it was then mid-day, shone around him. This light was a symbol of the divine presence, purity, and favour. Overpowered, Saul fell prostrate on the earth, filled with awe and surprise. These emotions are increased when this heavenly Being

cries to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" These are the accents of charity; they are the earnest and compassionate expostulation of Jesus with one who, though on the brink of destruction, perceives not his danger, and in the commission of guilt feels not his crime. 'Wherein have I injured thee? I died for thee, and now intercede in thy behalf. Is this the requital that is due to me? Wilt thou be so ungrateful as to reproach and blampheme the tenderest of friends? Wilt thou be so foolish as to contend with one possessed of unlimited power? Hast thou not already shed blood enough? In persecuting my disciples thou persecutest me, for they are united to me as members to their head. I feel what they suffer.' "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" O precious and consolatory truth for believers! that "in all their afflictions their Saviour is afflicted;" that he observes and tenderly sympathizes with them! Though the Lord spoke in mercy, he spoke also effectually; and Saul, convinced that the glory which had surrounded him, and the voice which addressed him, proceeded from heaven, exclaimed, "Who art thou, Lord," 'whom I have thus wickedly and ignorantly persecuted?' The Lord replied, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest;" 'that same Jesus who was delivered by wicked hands and crucified, but whom God raised from the dead, received into heaven, and crowned with the glory in which thou now beholdest me.' Who can conceive the fear and terror of Saul, overcome by the sense of guilt, and the glory of the Redeemer? All that he has done and said against this Jesus rises to his remembrance. He beholds his present power, and his conscience acknowledges that it is indeed "*hard to kick against the pricks.*" This is a proverbial mode of speaking,

the import of which is, Thy opposition is fruitless and unavailing; injurious only to thyself. "Trembling and astonished," penetrated to the heart, and, perhaps, doubting of pardon, but resigning himself to the Redeemer, he cries, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" 'I acknowledge my guilt; I submit to thine authority; I resign myself to thee; I am ready to obey thy laws.' He is directed to go into the city, where he would receive instruction concerning his duty. The Lord could immediately have taught him, but he chose to honour the ministry of his servant. Those who were with him had seen the light and heard a voice, but could not distinguish the words; and beheld no one amidst the glory, while Saul beheld the Redeemer. (ix. 17, 27, 1 Cor. xi. xv.) When Saul had risen from the ground he could not see; the brilliant lustre of the divine glory having deprived him of sight. His companions led him into Damascus: oh! with what different feelings from those with which he left Jerusalem. Instead of desiring to lead the disciples captive to the sanhedrim, he himself joyfully becomes the captive of the Redeemer.

Who will not here admire the grace of the Redeemer? Instead of crushing with his thunders the obstinate rebel, he speaks pardon. He manifests his mercy at the very moment that he was plunging his poignard in the bosom of Jesus, in the person of his members. It would have been a subject of praise, had he, in answer to prayer, given him consolation; but there was no preparation, no predisposition, no desire. No wonder that this apostle so strenuously insists on the doctrines of grace in all his writings. Take encouragement, trembling penitents, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." (1 Tim. i. 15, 16.)

Who will not admire the sovereignty of divine grace? His companions, less ferocious than himself, are not converted, while his heart is touched. How often do we thus see "one taken and another left?" How often, under the same external means, does one see Jesus, while others behold him not?

Who does not acknowledge the power of Jesus? In a moment he changes the lion into a lamb! the obstinate persecutor into a zealous disciple!\* The sentiments, temper, prejudices, secular interests, and honour of Paul were all opposed to the gospel; yet he immediately sacrifices every thing.

Who does not perceive the efficacy of prayer? Our Lord Jesus, on the cross, supplicated for his murderers, and the day of pentecost succeeded. Stephen prayed for his enemies, and Paul was converted!†

In the season of extremity God interposes. Succour is then nearest to the Christian when every thing appears desperate. When Paul approached Damascus, the church appeared lost; but they supplicated God and found it the moment of deliverance. The most cruel of the persecutions was that of Dioclesian, and God was then about to raise up Constantine to give peace to the church.

To all sinners the Lord Jesus will appear in his glory, in more terrible majesty than he did to Saul.

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\* "Fulminatus ad salutem." Aug. de Ver. Apost. Ser. 175.

† "Si Stephanus non orasset, ecclesia Paulum non habuisset."

Ah! if he was so overcome when the Saviour came on a purpose of mercy, what will be their feelings when he shall be decked in the robes of judgment? How will they then wish to hide themselves from his presence! Then they shall be as much appalled and surprised at the folly of their conduct, as was Saul on this occasion.

Saul then was conducted into Damascus. Though he was descended from Jewish parents, it was ordered by Divine Providence, that, as he was to be the apostle of the Gentiles, both the place of his birth and that of his conversion should be on Gentile ground. He remained for three days blind, and under such distress of soul that he neither ate nor drank. But doubtless these days were most profitably spent in meditation on his sin, in self-recollection, and in ardent prayer, in visions and the reception of instruction from Jesus. The Lord finally gives him consolation. An eminent disciple, named Ananias, at this time resided at Damascus. Of him we know nothing precise,\* except that "he was a devout man according to the law, and of good report among all the Jews that dwelt there." (xxii. 12.) To him the Lord appeared in vision, and directed him to go to the house where Saul remained, and where he had been forewarned by vision that Ananias would come and put his hand upon him as a signal

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\* Some, with the Apostolical Constitutions, suppose him to have been a layman; others, with Oecumenius, that he was a deacon, but certainly he was not one of those originally chosen. Others, with Austin, maintain that he was a priest. The modern Greeks maintain that he was of the seventy disciples; that he was afterwards Bishop of Damascus; and that, having been martyred, he was interred in that city. A church, converted into a mosque by the Turks, is supposed to contain his tomb, for which they preserve much respect. The Greeks observe his festival October 1; the Latins, January 25.

of miraculous restoration to sight. The Lord adds, as a proof of his conversion, "Behold, he prayeth." Doubtless Saul had often before this used forms of prayer; but he now prays in reality, with fervour, with humility, with penitence, and earnest desire of pardon, as a sinner, and in reliance upon the Saviour. Ah, my brethren! if the Omniscient were to describe us, are there not many of whom this would not be the character; many who never visit their closets; and others whose services are not regarded by him as real prayer? Be not deceived; such are not the real followers of Christ.

How much incredulity is found in the hearts even of believers! Ananias, at hearing this message, at first is alarmed, and, like Moses when sent to Pharaoh, wishes to be excused. He has heard of his persecutions in Jerusalem, and the intent for which he came to Demascus. The Lord removes his fears by saying, "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." The history of his life will show how perfectly this was accomplished.

The fears of Ananias were dissipated. He entered into the house and said, "Brother Saul." Oh! how does a common faith unite the children of God! These were before unacquainted, but they now regard each other as friends and fellow heirs of glory! None of his past offences are recalled to him; regarding only his present disposition, he addresses him as a brother. Imitate this example, Christians: when persons are truly converted, never reproach them for their former failings.

He delivers his message to Saul; lays his hands

upon him, and scales drop from his eyes, “an emblem of the veils being taken from his heart, and his soul filled with light and joy.” The Holy Ghost was communicated in his miraculous gifts, as well as graces, and he immediately submitted to the initiating ordinance of the church, and was baptized.

His strength was restored by food, and his soul cheered by spiritual joys, and he remained certain days with the disciples at Damascus. But, oh! how different was his intercourse with them from what he had anticipated!

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## SERMON LXVI.



LIFE OF PAUL.

No. II.

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ACTS ix. 20—30. xi. 25—30. 2 COR. xii. 1—10.

IN our last lecture we gave an account of Saul from his birth to the period of his extraordinary conversion. We saw his sanguinary fury and blind zeal against the disciples of Jesus, and admired the power and grace of the Redeemer, which were manifested in subduing his opposition and renewing his heart. In his subsequent conduct we shall see his sincerity fully proved by his incessant labours, and his unreserved devotedness to the Lord. Let us, then, step by step, mark his exertions, his trials, and his joys. Let us see the kingdom of Satan shaken wherever this herald of the cross announces the everlasting

gospel. And, oh! that by his example, we may acquire new zeal from God, unshaken confidence in our trials, and consolation in our sorrows!

Immediately after his miraculous call as an apostle of the Redeemer, and his entrance, by baptism, into the church, he fearlessly and faithfully preached Jesus. He who "had punished believers in every synagogue," now declared himself of their number in those synagogues of Damascus, to which he had brought letters, urging their assistance in his murderous designs. Both the friends and the foes of religion were astonished, and exclaimed, "Is not this he who destroyed them which called on this name at Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" Well might they wonder; for nothing but Omnipotence could have produced such a change. Some were converted by his ministry; others derided him as an apostate and an enthusiast; while many of the Jews, to whom, at this period, he more particularly addressed himself, were confounded by the force of his reasonings, and unable to reply to those arguments, by which he proved that Jesus was the Messiah foretold in their prophetic books, and so long and so anxiously expected by them. He preached Jesus; his character, his offices, the intent for which he came into the world, and the impossibility of salvation except through him. This was the great object, which, from the commencement to the termination of his ministry, claimed his attention. These were the truths which were carried home to the consciences of so many thousands, during his life, and which he still preaches to us in those writings which will console, edify, and instruct the church, till the consummation of all things.



But whence was it, my brethren, that Paul attained his knowledge of the whole system of Christianity? The appearance of Jesus to him in celestial glory, was sufficient to remove his deep prejudices against this Saviour, and to prove that he was the Messiah. But how could he at once obtain clear, just, and comprehensive views of a system so extensive, and so opposite to all his former prepossessions; a system not to be discovered by the unassisted operations of human reason, but founded on the will and revelation of God? Ananias was not sent as his teacher. He had seen none of the apostles; and even had he conversed with them, it would have been impossible from mere human instruction, so soon to obtain this knowledge. Ah! he only, who on the day of pentecost, enlightened the illiterate fishermen of Galilee, and dissipated those national prejudices concerning a temporal kingdom of Messiah, to which before they had so obstinately clung; he, who by his supernatural gifts, enabled so many of the primitive believers to declare, in tongues before unknown to them, the wonderful works of God; he alone could have thus instantaneously infused into Paul this divine light.

Brethren, we must not now, it is true, expect this immediate communication of scriptural knowledge without our concurrence. If, in the first ages of the church, as in the first deliverance of Israel, manna descended immediately from heaven, now that the church has extended itself and grown, we must labour if we would improve. And this is our duty. How much of the order, the connexion, the beauty of divine truth, which we have not yet perceived, and which we might discern, if, (to use the comparison of the apostle,) instead of being always satisfied with "*milk*," the food of infants, we would endeavour, as

spiritual men, to procure "*strong meat*." Yet let us remember, on the other hand, that study is in vain without the illumination of God. If the Holy Spirit will not now communicate to us, instantaneously, as he did to Paul, the whole scheme of gospel truth, yet he is ready in the exercise of his ordinary offices to believers, to open their minds, to cast light upon those scriptures which he himself hath inspired, and to cause us to "behold wondrous things in God's law." Seek then to grow in spiritual knowledge by the use of proper means; but, at the same time, fervently implore the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.

From Damascus, Paul passed into Arabia Deserta, (Gal. i. 17.) where he probably remained for a considerable time, preaching to the Jews who were in that country. What was his success, or what were the particular events that there occurred to him, we are no where informed. His labours and his trials there, are not, however, forgotten; they are written in the book of God's remembrance; they will be mentioned in the day of retribution; they will swell his future triumph, and will be recollected when the most durable monuments of worldly achievements, and the world itself, shall be buried in everlasting ruin.

On his return to Damascus, he again addressed himself to his unbelieving countrymen, whose situation deeply wounded his heart, and endeavoured to lead them to that Jesus who was now the only foundation of his hopes, the only theme of his discourses, the only ground of his glorying. If the truths of religion, when faithfully announced, do not soften, they harden the heart, and often irritate and inflame those to whom they are addressed. No wonder then that many, angry at his return to them, exasperated at his

perseverance, and his faithful warnings, and possessed of the same feelings which animated him before his conversion, resolved to put a period to his usefulness by his death. The governor of the city joined in the design; and Paul was so narrowly watched, and the gates so strictly guarded, that no way remained to save his life but by letting him down in a basket from a window of one of the houses that was on the wall. (2 Cor. xi. 32, 33.)

Thus early are we taught, by his history, and the lesson is constantly repeated through his whole life, that a believer must expect persecutions, and "through many tribulations must enter into the kingdom of God;" but thus, also, do we learn from his deliverance on this and subsequent occasions, that the Lord will preserve us till our work on earth is finished, and that with every trial, he will provide a way to escape.

[A. D. 38.] Leaving Damascus he went to Jerusalem. He had departed from this city a bigoted pharisee; he returns an humble believer; and immediately, instead of mingling with his former associates, with the members of the sanhedrim, the opulent, the distinguished, and the noble, he sought the company of the despised and persecuted disciples. True conversion will ever thus cause us to love an intercourse with those who are the friends of Jesus, and make us desire to be admitted to their fellowship and communion. The disciples, however, were yet afraid of him, and supposed that he wished to accomplish by artifice and subtlety, what he could not affect by open violence. In consequence of the want of communication between Damascus and Jerusalem, which had been caused by the war between Aretas, king of Arabia, and Herod

Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee,\* of the time which Paul had spent in the distant and unfrequented country of Arabia Deserta, and of the want of those means for a regular intercourse between distant places that are used in modern times, the disciples had heard little of him since his conversion. The situation of Paul was now indeed afflicting. Abandoned and hated by the Jews, he was an object of suspicion to the disciples; but Barnabas, an eminent disciple, who was acquainted with the character and conduct of Paul during the last three years, brought him to Peter and James the Less, the only apostles who were then at Jerusalem, and related the important change that had taken place in him, and his exemplary and zealous behaviour since. The apostles no longer hesitated, but joyfully received him into their society.

As the desire of Paul shows us the necessity of publicly uniting ourselves to the church; so that of Barnabas teaches us the propriety of exerting ourselves to bring young converts forward to the communion of the faithful.

In Jerusalem, Paul principally employed himself in answering the objections against the Christian doctrines which were made by the Grecians, or rather Hellenists, and in pressing upon them the truths of religion. These Hellenists were either such persons as had been converted from heathenism to Judaism, or merely foreign Jews, who used the Greek language in their synagogues and conversation.† With them Paul had associated in procuring the death of Stephen; and as he had sinned with them, he desires to bring them to partake of the same par-

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\* See Joseph. Ant. Lib. xviii. Cap. 7.

† The former is the opinion of Wolfius and Parkhurst. The latter of Doddridge, Campbell, Guyse, &c. Vide Parkhurst in *SYNOPTICON*.

don, and experience the same consolations, which he enjoys. Being enraged at his resolute defence of a system which they abhorred, at the force of his arguments, and at his abandonment of their party, they resolved to make him suffer the fate of Stephen. But the watchful providence of God protected him, and the brethren carried him to Cæsarea, and thence to Tarsus, his native city. He did not, however, depart from Jerusalem, merely in consequence of the prudent caution and desires of the disciples, but also at the express command of the Redeemer. Of this we are informed in the twenty-second chapter of the Acts. There we are told, that while Paul was praying in the temple, the Lord Jesus appeared to him and said, "Make haste and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." Thus directed, Paul did not hesitate, but confidently committed himself to the guidance of the Lord.

At Tarsus, and the "regions of Syria and Cilicia," (Gal. i. 21.) he remained three or four years; and, as Tarsus was on the sea-coast, he "probably undertook many short voyages to neighbouring countries, for the purpose of preaching the gospel; in the navigation of which he may have suffered some of those shipwrecks and disasters, to which he refers," (2 Cor. xi. 25.) and of which Luke has left us no particular account.\*

During the persecution which had occurred on the death of Stephen, numbers of the disciples had retired to Antioch, the capital of Syria. By them the church was increased. Their enemies intended

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\* See Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*, p. 139.

by their banishment to hinder the progress of the truth; but the Lord overruled their designs for good. Ah! how often do we see, in the course of Providence, that the "wrath of man praises God, while the remainder of wrath he restrains." To assist and strengthen the believers of Antioch, the church of Jerusalem had sent to them Barnabas. Under his preaching, "much people was added to the Lord." But feeling the necessity of a fellow-labourer in so populous a city, and warmly attached to Paul, he went to Tarsus to seek him, not envious of his superior talents, not fearing to be outshone by a brighter light, but regardful only of the interest of the Redeemer, and the good of souls. [A. D. 42.] Paul readily accompanied him, and they remained there for a year mutually labouring, and assisting each other. From the frequent visits of the apostle to Antioch, he appears to have been peculiarly attached to that church, which became one of the most flourishing that then existed.

Here the disciples first publicly assumed, and as the original implies,\* by divine warrant, the name of *Christians*. They were before called, by their enemies, Galileans or Nazarenes; and by themselves, disciples, believers, saints, and brethren. By this new title, they acknowledged the authority of Christ; that they were dependent upon him, and that they had received an unction from him. Happy would it be, my brethren, if we always realized the privileges, and complied with the duties and obligations which this august name imposes upon us. The disciples of Antioch showed that they possessed that benevolence which is one of the most distinguishing features

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\* Χριστιανισται.

of Christianity. Agabus had predicted that severe famine which all contemporary authors mention as prevailing during the reign of Claudius. Immediately the Christians, regarding this prediction as designed to teach them their duty, desirous to show their sympathy and union with their distant brethren, and knowing that the famine would be peculiarly oppressive in Judea, instead of imitating the Egyptians, and laying up corn only for themselves, collected supplies and sent them by the hands of Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem. Imitate their example, ye who enjoy the blessings of this world, and like them be prompt to relieve the necessitous.

It was at this time that Paul enjoyed that remarkable vision, mentioned 2 Cor. xii. At that happy time he was caught up to the third heaven; whether he was in or out of the body, he declares that he cannot tell. It is possible for God to present distant objects to the imagination in as clear and distinct a manner as though the soul were absent from the body and present with them; it is possible for him to convey both body and soul into heaven for what time he pleases; it is possible for him to transport thither the separated spirit, and in the mean time miraculously to preserve life in the body. Since the apostle himself felt unable to determine in which of these, or any of the other modes possible to Omnipotence, this splendid vision was presented to him, it is at once arrogant and useless for us to inquire. Who does not admire the high privilege of the apostle? Who can wonder that his zeal never abated after these glorious scenes; that in his heart and his affections he never descended from the third heaven; that he viewed with holy contempt the pomps and splendours, the thrones and sceptres, of the

world; that he never after trembled at the grave, or recoiled from death, but so often “desired to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better;” that in the ardour of his devotion, and the constancy of his service, he emulated the angels? Happier than the disciples who beheld the Lord Jesus transfigured upon Tabor, but who knew that afterwards he was to bleed, and agonize, and die, Paul saw him in a divine glory, the lustre of which he could not have sustained had he not been strengthened by divine power to behold it, and which he knew could never be diminished.

My brethren, we can never hope for this high privilege while we are on earth. But, oh! what cause have we to bless God for those ravishing glimpses of this felicity, which the Lord sometimes vouchsafes to believers; for the pledges, the earnest, and the first-fruits of it; for the privilege even here allowed them of conversing there as in the city which is their home, and hearing by faith the joyful harmony of the heavenly songs and praises of Jehovah; for the clear manifestation of it in the holy volume by the Son of God, that saw it and is preparing it for them; for the assurance that it is reserved for the pious, and that they shall enjoy it, not to be torn from it in a short time, and be constrained to cast a “lingering, longing look” towards it from this “dark sojourn,” but to be encompassed with it for ever.

While in this rapture, what did the apostle see and hear? He “heard unspeakable words, which it is not possible nor lawful\* for a man to utter.” The objects presented to him can be described in no

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\* The original is ambiguous, and conveys either of these ideas:  
*αγγελια ευμυλιη α ουκ εστιν.*



human terms, and cannot be comprehended by a human conception; and as the revelation then made to him was not intended as part of the rule of faith for Christians, it would have been unlawful to have declared it, even if it had been possible. My brethren, nothing can give us a higher idea of the heavenly felicity than this impotence of Paul to describe it. If he who had beheld these glories, and whose pen was guided by the Holy Spirit, still felt the poverty of human language, and its incapacity to give an adequate conception of these joys, how magnificent, how transporting must they be! Ah! shall we forfeit them for the meagre and perishable enjoyments of the world? Oh! let us frequently consider what a heaven we have to seek and hope for, that our exertions may be constant and great. We ought not to creep upon earth and feed on dust, if we were destined to inhabit only the sun, or some resplendent star; much less when we have a third heaven, to which we aspire.

But, alas! how chequered is the life of the Christian! How imperfect the holiness of the most advanced saint upon earth! The seeds of pride still remain in the heart, and are too apt to be excited even by those spiritual privileges which ought for ever to destroy them. After the most elevated joys, after paradisaical raptures, after converse with angels and the vision of the Redeemer, the apostle must again contend with trials and temptations. Lest through the remains of corruption within him, his heart should be unduly elated with these distinguished privileges, and be lifted up with pride, the Lord is pleased to visit him with some most severe and abasing affliction, painful as "a thorn in the flesh," festering it and producing the acutest pain.

and distressing as though "a messenger of Satan" had been sent to "buffet" and bruise him. What was precisely this "thorn in the flesh," this "messenger of Satan?" Did they constitute a single, or were they different afflictions? These are questions which I cannot answer. It would be easy to give you innumerable conjectures, but none of them can be demonstrated to be correct: and indeed it appears to me not improbable that our Saviour designedly left us ignorant of the precise trial of Paul, that whatever might be our trials, we might copy his example, and obtain deliverance in the same manner in which he was relieved. Oh! who after meditating on this history will consider this as his rest! Who in his highest spiritual enjoyments will foolishly cry, "We will here build our tabernacles!" We must often bear the cross before we can wear the crown; after descending from Tabor we must trace our Saviour's bloody steps upon Calvary.

The effect of this trial upon Paul was the same that affliction always produces upon the real believer. It drove him to the mercy-seat, and caused him to implore the succour of that Almighty Friend, who was once tempted and tried in all points like as we are, and who alone could console his heart. Not immediately receiving an answer, but resolved like Jacob not to let his Lord go without receiving from him a blessing, he thrice implored his Saviour that this trial might be removed, as Jesus himself in his agony thrice supplicated the Father that "this cup might pass from him."

Persevering prayer never is unanswered; though we may be heard, and our requests granted in a manner different from what we expected, and not according to the letter of our petition, but more for our

good and the divine glory. Though the affliction was not removed, Paul received that precious assurance, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." "The love and favour which I will manifest to thee, the aids and comforts which I will communicate, the grace which shone so conspicuously in thy conversion, shall uphold thee in thy trials, and enable thee with the richest benefit to thine own soul to triumph over thy difficulties and distress. For my power shall be more illustriously displayed in proportion to thine inability and weakness."

This was enough and more than enough for Paul. He not only acquiesced and submitted to the disposals of Providence, but even rejoiced and gloried in those afflictions, that he was assured would produce such excellent fruits.

Happy for us, my brethren, if our various trials have such blessed effects. Then we may exult in sorrows, reproaches, and pains. They prove the means of displaying the power of a supporting Redeemer; they are sent, not to bruise, but merely to polish us, as living stones for the heavenly temple. Let us only have the grace of Jesus resting upon us, and no adversary shall be too strong, no calamity too heavy, no duty too difficult.

## SERMON LXVII.



LIFE OF PAUL.

No. III.



ACTS xii. 25. xiii. xiv.

IN our last lecture we attended Paul to Jerusalem, whither he went in company with Barnabas, to carry contributions from the believers of Antioch to the Christians suffering under the famine which prevailed in the reign of Claudius. Having executed their commission, they returned to Antioch, bringing with them John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas, and son of that Mary, at whose house the disciples had met to pray for Peter, when he was delivered by the angel. They brought him that he might assist them in their multiplied labours, and be gradually trained up for the full exercise of the ministerial functions.

The time, however, had now arrived, when they were to carry to more distant regions the religion of Jesus, and cause the light and the consolations of the gospel to beam upon those who had hitherto been involved in the darkness of paganism. They were directed thus to act by an express revelation from heaven. In the church of Antioch, which may be regarded as the **mother** church of believing Gentiles, there were not only teachers and ordinary ministers

of religion, but also prophets, who, under the immediate influence of the Spirit, sometimes predicted future events, and at other times were employed in explaining the mystic sense of the oracles of the Old Testament.\* Among these were Barnabas himself, who had been a Levite, and who on his conversion had devoted his large estate to purposes of charity, and to the advancement of religion; Simeon, or Simon, who is supposed by many to have been Simon the Cyrenean, who bore the cross of the Saviour; Lucius, also of Cyrene; Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, but who, like Moses, cheerfully renounced all prospects of temporal advantage, and chose rather to be a companion of the despised believers, than the friend and associate of a persecuting prince; and Saul himself.

While these [A. D. 45.] were engaged in the solemn offices of religion, praying for the prosperity of the church, and seeking direction in their endeavours to extend it, the Holy Ghost ordered them, either by a distinct voice, or by immediate suggestion, to separate Paul and Barnabas, for the purpose of carrying the gospel to the Gentiles. For this office they were well suited, not only from their zeal, their piety, and the supernatural endowments they had received from the Holy Spirit; but also because they were both born on Gentile ground: the one at Tarsus, the other at Cyprus. To this office Paul had expressly been designated at the period of his conversion, the Lord Jesus then declaring that he was "a chosen vessel to bear his name

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\* For a view of the New Testament prophets, see Whitby's General Preface to the Epistles, and Vitringa's Synag. Vet. lib. i. pars ii. cap. vii.

before the Gentiles." But he was to be prepared for this mission by retirement, meditation, and converse with God; he was to wait for the directions of Him to whom he had committed himself, and at whose disposal he was. The predestined hour had now come: his Lord gave the signal, and he cheerfully complied with his call. The pastors of Antioch tenderly commended them to the blessing of God, and, according to the established use of the Jews, laid their hands upon them, to give them a solemn benediction.

Let us in this lecture attend them during, if I may use the expression, their first missionary tour, and mark their labours till they returned to Antioch. The gospel hitherto had been preached only to the Jews, or to proselyted Gentiles; but these holy men are now about to bear it to those who were in the grossest superstition, unacquainted with the oracles of the Old Testament, and bowing down to imaginary deities polluted with every vice. They know the dangers they will incur; the persecutions they may expect; but from these dangers they do not shrink; the prospect of these persecutions, far from appalling them, does not cause them for a moment to hesitate or delay. They know that the Lord is with them, and they do not fear what man can do unto them. Happy they, who thus always wait for the guidings of Providence, and put themselves under the protection of the Almighty! Their hearts shall be unagitated with apprehension at the view of the most formidable dangers.

From Antioch they went to Seleucia, a city about fifteen miles distant, situated on the Mediterranean, near the mouth of the Crontes. Here they did not long remain, but embarked for the island of Cyprus.

Perhaps they were induced first to visit this island, because it was the native place of Barnabas. There doubtless he had many connexions and friends, with whom he had lived in the days of his spiritual ignorance, and whose conversion and salvation he ardently desired: for though the Christian feels for all, and is filled with joy when he hears of the progress of religion even among strangers, yet he is especially interested for those connected to him by blood or friendship, and peculiarly desirous that those with whom he trod in the paths of carelessness and folly, during his state of unregeneracy, should unite with him in celebrating the triumphs of grace and the love of the Redeemer.

Cyprus was famous for its riches, but execrable for its immoralities. Impurity was the presiding deity of the island, and had its temples, its altars, and its sacrifices. It would have seemed that the disciples had here little prospect of success: but they went forth mighty in the strength of truth, and in the promised support of the Most High.

They landed at Salamis, the chief town on the eastern part of the island, and immediately went into the synagogue and preached to the Jews. To these they always made their first address, both in compliance with the command of their Lord, and that their doctrine might be submitted to all the objections and scrutiny of those to whom the oracles of the Old Testament were committed. Having remained here but a short time, they passed through the greater part of the island, offering salvation to the perishing, and pardon to the guilty, as they passed along. They arrived at last at Paphos, the chief city on the western coast, celebrated for its port, its splendid temple of Venus, and those iniquitous fes-

tivals which were there annually celebrated, and which attracted thither so many strangers. Much indeed did this place need the influences of Him who "was manifested to destroy the works of the devil."

Here resided Sergius Paulus, the deputy or Roman governor of the place. Hearing of the new doctrine that was preached by Paul and Barnabas, he was desirous to examine before condemning it, and therefore sent for these disciples. A Jew, however, by the name of Bar-Jesus, or, as he was called from the Arabic, Elymas, endeavoured to prejudice him against it. This person, who pretended to supernatural powers, exerted himself with as much bitterness, though with as little effect, as did the magicians to oppose Moses. Paul, having in vain reasoned and expostulated with him, seeing his enmity against the truth still increase, knowing the deep wickedness of his soul; having his heart wounded by those blasphemies against the Redeemer which he, doubtless, like the other Jews, uttered; and immediately inspired by the Holy Ghost, resolved to show his miraculous power, and thus prove the divinity of his mission and the truth of his doctrine. He therefore fixedly regarded Elymas; reproached him with his guilt; declared that he imitated the great deceiver, and endeavoured to establish the kingdom of Satan; told him that he should feel the power of that Saviour whom he blasphemed; that as he closed his own soul against the light of the Sun of Righteousness, and endeavoured to keep others in darkness, so he should endure a fit and emblematic punishment, and for a season should not behold the sun of the universe. The threatening was immediately accomplished; the governor converted; and the arts of



Satan discomfited. What permanent effect was produced upon Elymas, we know not. Origen and Chrysostom have asserted from tradition that he was converted. Of this, however, we have no proof. If it were so, happy indeed for him was that temporary blindness, which was the means of bringing him "from the kingdom of darkness into God's marvelous light."

My brethren, opposition is still made to the gospel of the Redeemer; it has still enemies as furious and implacable as was Elymas. Let them see in him the vanity of their opposition, the impotence of their malice. It is true they need not now fear to be punished with natural blindness, but a more dreadful doom will await them if they persevere in their enmity. The "god of this world" will be permitted to blind them here below; the eyes of their understandings shall be darkened, and they shall be reserved for "chains of darkness for ever."

Doubtless it would have given delight to the governor to have contributed to the felicity of Paul, and this apostle might have remained a long time with his illustrious convert, enjoying the highest temporal pleasures. But he renounces the pleasures of earth for the performance of important duties; he rushes forward immediately to new trials and new exertions, and looks only to heaven as the place of rest.

With his beloved Barnabas, he passes over to Perga, a city of Pamphylia, in Asia Minor. Here too idolatry reared its altars, and a noted temple was dedicated to Diana. How long they remained here, or what was the effect of their preaching, we are not informed. We are grieved in learning that John Mark, sighing for ease, and apprehensive of the dan-

gers he might yet encounter, here deserted them, and returned to Jerusalem.

But, not discouraged by his conduct, they continued their course and arrived at Antioch of Pisidia, a different and remote city from Antioch of Syria, whence they had commenced their journey. Here, according to their usual practice, they went to the synagogue, where the Jews were assembled for religious worship, that they might have an opportunity of leading them to the Messiah promised to their fathers. When the regular lessons from the law and the prophets had been read, the ruler of the synagogue asked Paul and Barnabas if they would speak, either to expound these chapters, or give an exhortation on other subjects of religion.

Paul instantly rose, and in an animated and solemn address, retraced to them the favours of God to their ancestors, and the preparations which he had made for the advent of the Saviour; declared that Jesus was the Messiah who had been predicted; proved that his rejection and crucifixion were in conformity with ancient prophecy; showed that he was raised from the dead, according to the scriptures; solemnly assured them, that if they were ever justified and freed from guilt and condemnation, it must be, not through the pompous ceremonies and ministrations of the Mosaic law, but through him; and warned them not to bring upon themselves that tremendous prophetic curse, which God had denounced upon all who neglect or despise this full and free salvation.

This address was not in vain. Some of the Jews, it is true, still remained unaffected; but many of them and of the proselytes were deeply affected, and accompanied Paul and Barnabas, that they might

obtain fuller information; the Gentiles urged the apostle to discourse to them on this infinitely momentous subject on the ensuing Sabbath. When the day had arrived, immense crowds were collected, both of the idolatrous and proselyted Gentiles. At this the jealousy of the Jews was excited; they were enraged, and blasphemed. Instead of showing the temper of the angels, who rejoice at the repentance of a sinner, they displayed the cruel spirit of the elder brother, and were unwilling that others should share with them the blessings of the covenant. Paul, not terrified by their blasphemies and their threats, declared to them, that though in conformity with the command of Jesus, he had made to them the first offer of eternal life, yet, since they so obstinately rejected it, he now turned to the Gentiles. Many of these, rejoicing to hear that there was pardon offered even to them, thankfully and joyfully embraced the doctrines of the gospel, and devoted themselves to the Redeemer. Nor were the triumphs of grace confined to Antioch, but extended to the whole country round about. Brethren, like these Gentiles, let us desire, Sabbath after Sabbath, to hear these same truths; those same great fundamental doctrines of the gospel, connected with the incarnation, the death, the resurrection of Jesus, by which our souls must live. Unlike the Jews, let us rejoice whenever we hear that the kingdom of God is extended, and the cause of the Redeemer advanced. Let us not be filled with envy, nor fear that our portion will be diminished by their felicity. There is enough and to spare in our Saviour for us all. Let us adore the sovereignty of divine grace in the effects of the preached gospel. Now, as in the days of Paul, it hardens and inflames some, while it melts and soft-

ens others: it often reclaims a profligate, like the Gentile, while often, alas! one who, like the Jew, has been brought up in the house of God, hears it without emotion. Let us inquire whether, like these Jews, we have hitherto rejected it, and thus "judged ourselves unworthy of eternal life;" and if we have, let us in time awake. Suppose not that Jesus will want worshippers, or heaven inhabitants; if you refuse, others shall be induced to come. The wedding festival still shall be thronged with guests, even though those who are first asked "begin to make excuse."

The Jews were still more exasperated by the success of the gospel among the Gentiles; and they therefore excited a host of persecutors, and among them, some women of rank and apparent sanctity, through whose influence Paul and Barnabas were expelled from those parts. They departed, shaking off the dust from their feet, according to the directions of Jesus, as a testimony against their ingratitude and unbelief. But still, the sacred writer assures us, "the disciples" of Antioch, in Pisidia, "were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost." Notwithstanding they had been separated from their teachers, they rejoiced that Christ remained; and they cheerfully bore those persecutions that could not impair their inward tranquillity and peace.

The banishment of these holy men tended to the benefit of other places. They immediately went to Iconium, the capital of Lycaonia, a neighbouring province. Here at first they were eminently successful. The warmth and boldness of their addresses, the miracles which they wrought, and the accompanying energy of the Holy Spirit, caused numbers to receive "the truth as it is in Jesus."

But the malice of the Jews was again excited; they again prejudiced many of the people against them; and a plot was formed to put them to a violent death. As they did not fear, so they did not court persecution; and therefore when they were informed of this design, they retired to Lystra, another city of the same province.

Here they arrested the public attention by a miraculous cure. A poor cripple, who had been lame from his birth, resided in this place. Paul, moved with compassion at his sad situation, and for the confirmation of his own mission, healed him perfectly and instantaneously by a single word. The people saw in this the evidence of divine power: but ascribing to the instruments the honour due only to the Lord, they cried out in amazement and with wild tumult, "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men!" From the age and venerable appearance of Barnabas, they supposed him to be Jupiter; while Paul, from his eloquence, was supposed to be Mercury. The priest of Jupiter, attended by a crowd of the inhabitants, prepared to pay them divine honours, and brought oxen to sacrifice to them, crowned with garlands, according to the pagan rites. Who can conceive the anguish of the apostles at this spectacle? It filled them with deeper sorrow than did their severest persecutions. Far from being elated, as was Herod, when the crowd with impious flattery exclaimed, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" they rent their garments, to testify their detestation of this blasphemy, and rushing among the crowd, earnestly entreated them to desist, vehemently remonstrated on the wickedness and folly of worshipping men like themselves, and declared that the end of all their preaching was to make them

abandon these superstitions and idolatries, and serve the living God, the Creator and Preserver of heaven and of earth. With difficulty, however, could they persuade these deluded men to refrain. How beautiful an example do these disciples here give of their superiority to all selfish views! Seeking not their own fame, but the glory of Jesus, not personal applauses, but the conversion of souls, every thing that improperly exalts them and hides the Redeemer, deeply wounds their hearts.

Alas! what is human applause! How precarious and unsubstantial! This same people, who were about to worship Paul as a deity, were, immediately afterwards, furiously exasperated against him by the calumnies of the unbelieving Jews who came from Antioch and Iconium, and as they had put no bounds to their admiration, so they have no limits to their hatred. Endeavouring to immolate him, to whom they had lately been about to immolate victims, they rose up against him, stoned him, dragged him out of the city with contempt, and left him apparently dead. But the Lord had yet much work for him to perform; he therefore restored him to life; and the next day Paul departed with Barnabas to Derbe. Such is the world! A small thing will frequently excite its highest admiration, and cause it to elevate its favourites to heaven. As small a thing will rouse its indignation, and provoke its fury. One day it will cry with rapture, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" and the next will exclaim, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Such is human life! We perpetually see persons passing from the highest exaltation to the deepest abasement, or from the deepest abasement to the highest exaltation. Nothing in it is fixed or permanent. Oh! then, let us seek that immutable "ho-

nour which cometh of God only," that firm and stable "kingdom which can never be moved."

Wounded as he was, and not dispirited by his sufferings, he preached at Derbe with his accustomed fervour, and was blest by beholding many embracing the gospel. This city terminated the first circuit of Paul and Barnabas. Instead of proceeding further, they returned back to those places where they had laboured. Knowing the importance of confirming the young converts, they disregarded the dangers that awaited them, and the enemies with whom they would have to contend. They exhorted and strengthened the believers, forewarned them that they must expect trials, and that "through much tribulation they must enter into heaven;" and having constituted churches and ordained officers, solemnly commended them to Christ.

At last they returned to Antioch, in Syria. There they gratefully erected their Ebenezer, and cried, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped us." Assembling the church, they related to it the blessings which God had bestowed on them, the deliverances they had received from him, the success of their labours, and especially the full confirmation of this delightful truth, that God "had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles."

Such was the first mission among those who like our fathers were idolaters, "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and without hope in the world." It is a subject that deeply interests us. Had it not been for this and similar missions, we, my brethren, should now have been bowing down to stocks and to stones, or besmearing the altars of devils with human blood. Oh! when we recollect those cruel, impure.

and abominable worships, which formerly prevailed in every country, the civilized as well as the savage, where the revelation of God did not shine, and which still are found in every nation under heaven that is not enlightened by the gospel of Jesus; when we remember their false and horrible sentiments concerning the Divinity, their ignorance concerning the end for which they were created and their future destination, the agonies which in this state of darkness must besiege their souls upon the bed of death; when we contrast with this the beauty of our religion, the sublimity of its doctrines, the purity of its motives, the greatness of its promises, the simplicity of its worship, the light which it sheds upon futurity, the consolations which it gives to the dying, and in which you hope one day to participate, will you not bless those apostolic men who bore this treasure to your fathers; will you not express your gratitude to that God, who hath visited you with this salvation?



## SERMON LXVIII.



LIFE OF PAUL.

No. IV.



ACTS xv. GALATIANS ii. 11—17. ACTS xvi.

IN our last lecture, we accompanied Paul in his first mission to propagate the religion of Jesus. We are not informed of any of his actions, from the time of his return, A. D. 45, to the period, A. D. 51, when the council of Jerusalem was held. By some it has been supposed that it was during this interval that he preached from Jerusalem to Illyricum. (Rom. xv. 19, 20.)

A dispute at this time arose at Antioch which threatened the peace and prosperity of that society, and which was afterwards frequently renewed in the apostolic churches. Some Jewish converts came down from Jerusalem, and taught, that circumcision and the other ordinances of the Mosaic ritual were absolutely necessary for salvation. This sentiment obtained more credit, because they falsely attributed it to the apostles and the church of Jerusalem. It was strenuously opposed by Paul and Barnabas, as inconsistent with that fundamental doctrine of the gospel, justification by faith in Christ alone; as imposing an unnecessary yoke upon the Gentile converts; and as calculated to impede the progress of the gos-

peł. To compose the dissensions which this question had excited, Paul and Barnabas, with Titus and some others of the brethren, were deputed to go up to Jerusalem to obtain the opinion of the apostles, elders, and that church, by whom these zealots declared that they were supported. Though they found at Jerusalem some persons, who, having been converted from the sect of the Pharisees,\* still maintained an undue regard to the Jewish ceremonies, and supposed their observance to be indispensable, yet the apostles, after a solemn consultation, declared that they were unnecessary; and that from the nature of the thing, from the declarations of the prophets, and from the seal of the Holy Spirit, who had descended on them when uncircumcised, and had purified their hearts by faith, it appeared that the Gentiles were complete in Christ. To prevent, however, unnecessary offence to the Jewish converts, and to promote harmony and love among the members of the church, the Gentile Christians were commanded to abstain from certain things which were calculated to wound the feelings of their brethren, and to lead them again into idolatry, or excite the suspicion that they were guilty of it. This prohibition, however, with the exception of one act of moral guilt to which it refers, is generally supposed to have been temporary, and founded on the peculiar state of the church at that period. A decree to this effect was sent down to the church at Antioch by Judas, surnamed Barsabas, and Silas or Silvanus, prophets of eminent gifts, who accompanied Paul and Barnabas; and while at that time it terminated the dispute, it afforded joy to the Gentile churches.

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\* Others imagine, that verse fifth is the language of Paul to the council.

My brethren, though we no longer need fear the revival of this error ; though no Christians now would maintain that the observation of the Jewish law is necessary to justification ; yet, alas ! there are many who advocate sentiments too similar to those advanced by these persons. Supposing that the perfect righteousness of Christ is not a sufficient ground of trust, they introduce conditions and terms of justification as inconsistent with the tenor of the gospel, and as impossible to be united with the full atonement of Jesus, as were the Mosaic ceremonies. Oh ! let us be careful to lay no other foundation than that which is laid, and let Christ, in the justification of the sinner, be esteemed all and in all.

Shortly after this period, Peter came down to Antioch, and lived at first without any scruple among the Gentile Christians. But some persons coming from Jerusalem, where many were still very much attached to the ceremonies of the law, Peter, lest he should offend these persons, withdrew from the Gentiles, and would no more eat with them. The worst effects appeared likely to result from his example. The Jews, and Barnabas himself, separated with Peter, though they knew that they were thus encouraging in their errors those who were obstinately mistaken zealots. To prevent the formation of a party which threatened to distract the church, Paul, with candour and with force, though with tenderness and love, openly reprov'd Peter. The apostle received the reproof with meekness ; abstained in future from that "fear of man which bringeth a snare," and cherished an augmented love for his faithful friend. (Gal. ii. 11—17.)

Paul, having thus defended the liberty of the Gentiles in the church of Antioch, proposed to Barnabas

to return and visit those congregations which they had formed during the missionary tour they had made together some years before. He was anxious to confirm, to console, and exhort them to continue in the faith, notwithstanding the afflictions and persecutions to which they were exposed. Barnabas readily consented; but, alas! in the execution of the plan, differences arose between these affectionate friends, which proved that they were still imperfect men, and which caused them to separate from each other. Barnabas, attached to his nephew John Mark, who had formerly quitted them in Pamphylia, and persuaded that he would not again abandon them, wished to receive him once more as their associate. Paul, on the contrary, supposing that he might again manifest the same unsteadiness which he had before displayed, and abandon them when the functions of their ministry became painful and perilous, would not consent that he should accompany them. Neither was disposed to abandon his opinion; the dispute between them was managed with a blameable warmth of temper; and they separated, never again to meet in this world; Barnabas taking with him John Mark, and going to Cyprus, and Paul, accompanied by Silas, visiting the churches in Syria and Cilicia.

This is not the event in the life of Paul, which we should select in forming his eulogium; but the impartial relation of it shows the sincerity of the sacred writers. It teaches us always to be watchful over our hearts, since whatever attainments we have made in piety there is always within us a latent principle of corruption, which circumstances may unexpectedly draw forth. It shows us that there is but one character which is all lustrous and pure, and which

in all situations we may propose to ourselves as a model, that of our blessed Redeemer; but one sun that is without a spot, the brilliant Sun of Righteousness.

But notwithstanding this temporary anger, the most perfect friendship was soon restored between these holy men. It was impossible, indeed, that it should be otherwise. Two persons, who so ardently loved the Redeemer, and were so zealously engaged in advancing his cause, might have occasional misunderstandings which they would lament, but their hearts must be closely cemented together by Christian affection. We are, therefore, gratified in finding Paul so often, in his epistles, speaking with the tenderest affection, not only of his beloved Barnabas, but also of John Mark, concerning whose character it appears that his uncle judged correctly, whose services to the church he commended, and whom he warmly praises to the believers of Colosse. (1 Cor. ix. 6. Col. iv. 9, 10. 2 Tim. iv. 11.) Let us thus always correct our errors, when we offend through the want of mutual candour and forbearance.

The overruling providence of God from evil educes good. This division of sentiments between Barnabas and Paul tended to the furtherance of the gospel, and the edification of the church, since these two great men visited more places than they would have done had they remained together, and established two important missions, instead of one, which they originally proposed.

Having passed through Syria and Cilicia, every where confirming the faith of the disciples, Paul arrived at Derbe and Lystra, in Pamphylia, places where he and Barnabas had formerly preached with

great success. At the latter city he met with one who is often afterwards mentioned, and to whom he became tenderly attached. It was Timothy, the son of Eunice, a Jewish mother and a true believer, and of a Gentile father, who, however, was probably a proselyte. Timothy had, perhaps been converted during the former visit of Paul; and though yet young, was noted for his gifts and graces. These were the effect of the blessing of God upon a pious education; for Paul elsewhere teaches us, that he had been instructed from his infancy in the Scriptures, and had thus been prepared to receive the gospel. (2 Tim. iii. 15.) Though the apostle had so strenuously opposed circumcision, as a bond on the conscience, and as necessary to salvation, yet, through prudence and charity, he caused Timothy to submit to this ceremony. He wished to employ him for the conversion of the Jews at Lystra and Iconium. Without this rite, these would not associate with him, and especially would not admit him into their synagogues. For the sake of a ceremony, useless indeed to salvation, but necessary for the great object that he had in view, the apostle would not put an invincible obstacle in the way of the conversion of that multitude of the Jews, who, he supposed, might be brought to a knowledge of the truth through the ministry of Timothy.

There was not the smallest opposition between his conduct on this occasion, and his firm opposition, in his late visit to Jerusalem, to the circumcision of Titus, though many of the believers there earnestly desired it. (Gal. ii. 3.) The cases were different: and in both instances he acted from the same prudence and charity. Those who wished the performance of this rite upon Titus, were converted Jews.

who maintained that its observance was essential to everlasting felicity. To have acquiesced in their wishes, would have been an acknowledgment of a principle which the apostle always opposed, and an abandonment of those principles of Christian liberty which he always advocated.

Much of Christian wisdom, my brethren, consists in knowing when to bear with the infirmities of the weak, and yield, even to the prejudices of the bigotted, in points not essential, that we may have an opportunity of promoting their true interest; and when openly and boldly to assert the privileges of the gospel. But let us beware lest we abuse the example of Paul: always remembering, that in things clearly sinful, the smallest concession is prohibited, and is a violation of our duty.

After visiting the churches where he had formerly preached, Paul and his companions passed through Phrygia, where many new seals to his ministry were given him; (Acts xviii. 23.) and through Galatia, where, as he himself declares, (Gal. iv. 14.) he was "received as an angel from God," and where at this time he probably founded those churches to which he afterwards directed an epistle. It was his intention to have preached in the neighbouring provinces, but he was prevented by immediate revelation from God from going thither at this time; and under divine direction he came to Troas, a place situated on the Ægean sea. Here he was admonished by a supernatural vision to pass over into Europe, and carry thither the light and consolations of the gospel. Without hesitancy he obeys the call, regardless of the new trials and dangers to which he will be exposed. He embarked at Troas, with his former companions, and Luke, who here united himself to

him, and was ever after his inseparable associate. Passing by the island of Samothracia, and the seaport of Neapolis, they came to the Macedonian city of Philippi, which at this time was a Roman colony. Here they remained a considerable time, and during their residence several things occurred deserving our attention.

At a little distance from the city, and by the river side, for the purpose of ceremonial ablutions, was a *proseuché*, or house of prayer. Thither the Jews and proselytes were accustomed to resort for the purpose of public worship. On the Sabbath after their arrival, Paul and his companions went to this spot, hoping they might there have an opportunity of doing good. They found there only females. Paul declares to them the great truths of the gospel: they all listen, but one only is converted. So true is it, that though "Paul may plant and Apollos water, it is God only that can give the increase." "The Lord opened the heart" of Lydia: she was a Gentile, proselyted to the Jewish faith, originally of Thyatira, but resident in Philippi, where she trafficked in those purple stuffs that were then so much esteemed. By the inward and powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, the word is carried home to her heart, and she joyfully and thankfully accepts of salvation through the Redeemer. She immediately makes a public profession of her faith; and received within the covenant, has the seal of baptism applied to herself and her family. Penetrated with gratitude to the apostle and those who accompanied him; regarding them as Lot did the angels who came to warn him of the approaching destruction of the city, and exhort him to flee from its flames; she, like Lot, is desirous to exercise her hospitality, and en-



treats them, "If ye have judged me to be faithful, come into my house and abide there." The apostle and his associates complied with her request, and remained with her during their residence at Philippi.

A damsel, pretending to a demoniacal possession, several times publicly testified that Paul and his companions were the servants of the Most High God, and taught the only way of salvation. What was her motive in giving this testimony, we know not; whether she wished to ingratiate herself with the apostle, in hopes of a recompense from him, or whether she might desire to persuade the people that there was a confederacy between Satan and these holy men. Paul, however, to show that he did not need this disgraceful testimony, commanded the evil spirit to depart from her. In consequence of this ejection, her owners, who had reaped large profits from her magical arts, dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrates, and accused them of sedition, and an attempt to introduce a religion subversive of that established by the laws. The magistrates, without examination, tore their clothes from them, caused them to be publicly and severely scourged, and committed them to the charge of an austere and inhuman jailer. He, rejoicing in the commission, thrust them into one of the closest cells, and secured their feet in the stocks. But while thus unjustly suffering in a dungeon, separated from their friends, and with their bodies covered with wounds, were they unhappy? Ah, no! the darkness of their dungeon could not exclude the light of God's countenance; the unkindness of men was compensated by the smiles of their Heavenly Father; and amidst the pains of their bodies, their souls were filled with

divine consolations. At midnight they were heard to pray aloud: they supplicated for themselves; they doubtless also implored mercy for their persecutors, and their prayers were heard. To their prayers they add hymns of praise, extolling God for his perfections, and rejoicing that they "are counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus." While they thus are converting their dungeon into a temple, the Lord interposes in their behalf: the earth trembles; the foundations of the prison are shaken; the doors are thrown open; and their fetters are broken asunder. The jailer, alarmed, and apprehensive that the prisoners had escaped, was about to deprive himself of life, to avoid a public execution, which in such cases was inflicted by the Roman laws. Paul arrested his criminal design, by crying to him that the prisoners were all safe. A greater convulsion was felt in his soul than that which had agitated the earth. Terrified and filled with apprehension, this sinner, lately so stout-hearted, throws himself at the feet of those same men whom he had lately treated with such cruelty and contempt; and under a deep concern for his soul, cries out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Ah! what a change was this! How evidently does it show the power of God, and teach us how easily he can shake with terrors, and fill with deep distress, his most furious enemies!

Paul and Silas joyfully instructed him: forgetting their own stripes, they were only anxious to heal his wounded conscience, and they pointed him to the blessed Redeemer. He by faith embraced him as the Saviour of perishing sinners, and the most rapturous peace and joy succeeded to his anguish. He

immediately brought the disciples from their dungeon, tenderly washed their wounds, and was baptized with all his family. Ah! with what delight did he during his life, and does he now from heaven, look back upon the transactions of that sacred night!

The magistrates, perhaps terrified by the earthquake, and convinced of the innocence of those whom they had so unjustly imprisoned, ordered them in the morning to be liberated. Paul, however, with firmness, remonstrated against the arbitrary and tyrannical proceedings of the magistrates, which violated their rights as Roman citizens. The officers made concessions, with which they were satisfied; and Paul and Silas, having visited the brethren, departed from Philippi.

Such was the origin of one of the most important apostolical churches! Such were the means used by Providence to introduce the gospel into Europe!

## SERMON LXIX.



LIFE OF PAUL.

No. V.



ACTS xvii.

THE more I study the life of Paul, the more I am filled with admiration at the ardour of his zeal, and the immensity of his labours. What multitudes of churches did he establish! What numerous converts did he bring to the Redeemer! Into what various and distant places did he bear the banner of the cross! The most celebrated cities, Antioch, Athens, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome, acknowledged him, as the herald of salvation. Countries most remote from each other, Arabia, Greece, Illyria, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Syria, Epirus, Italy, resounded with his preaching. All situations give him an opportunity of signalizing his zeal. He preaches Christ in the synagogues of the Jews, and the assemblies of believers; to the philosophers in the Areopagus at Athens, and to the courtiers in the pretorium, and in the palace of Nero; in prison to the family of the jailer; among the great, to Festus, Agrippa, Bernice, and all their train; "in season and out of season," he every where testifies "the gospel of the grace of God;" continual journeyings, and painful voyages, give him no ease or relaxation. The whole

object of his life is to advance the kingdom of the Redeemer.

And what is the recompense which he obtains from men for this anxious desire for their salvation? Here, the populace insult him; there, his countrymen endeavour to deprive him of life. At Cæsarea, Festus accuses him of being a madman; at Athens, the philosophers deride him and treat him with contempt. He restores to the use of his limbs the poor cripple of Lystra, and is stoned till apparently dead. He delivers the possessed damsel at Philippi, and notwithstanding his privileges as a Roman citizen, is cruelly scourged and imprisoned. Yet still undaunted and undisgusted by this base return, he continues his labours of love. A life so generous, so various, so full of persecutions, cannot fatigue us. Let us then still prosecute his history; and oh! that we may catch more of his spirit, and be inflamed with his zeal, and partake more of those divine consolations and supports which alone could have enabled him to persevere in his course.

In our last lecture we beheld the apostle leaving Philippi in company with Silas and Timothy. Luke, as we judge from the change of his style in this part of his relation, remained behind them, probably visiting and confirming the churches in the vicinity, till the return of Paul thither, when he again joined him. The others passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, in which places however they did not remain, probably going further from the suggestions of the Holy Spirit, who directed them immediately in all their journeyings. They arrived then at Thessalonica, a city which derived its name from the victory which Philip of Macedon there gained over the Thessalians, which was the capital of Macedonia,

and the residence of the Roman governor of the province. Here was a large synagogue of the Jews, into which Paul, as was his custom, first entered; and as they were principally assembled on the Sabbath, he, ever shunning privacy, but desirous that his doctrines should be brought to the light, for three successive weeks, on that day, reasoned with them from the Old Testament; proved to them from the prophecies, that the Messiah whom they expected, was not to be, as they fondly imagined, a haughty and victorious temporal prince, but was to suffer and die before he entered into that glory, whence he should govern the world and dispense blessings to his people: he proved to them that the traits which designated Messiah in the holy oracles, were all united in Jesus of Nazareth, and that he therefore was the long-expected deliverer promised to their fathers. These points he illustrated with a fearlessness, unimpaired by his past sufferings from the prejudice and bigotry of his nation. This he asserts in the appeal which he afterwards made to that church: "After we were shamefully entreated at Philippi, yet we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God." (1 Thess. ii. 2.) His addresses not only convinced the understandings, but were carried home to the consciences of some of the Jews, and of many of the proselyted Gentiles and women of distinction. From various circumstances, and from the whole tenor of the epistle to the Thessalonians, it appears that, after thus offering salvation to the Jews, the apostle remained here some time, and directed his labours principally to the idolatrous Gentiles. His success was such as to animate his heart. Very many abandoned their false worship to serve the living God. This he himself testifies in his epistle to

them: "Our gospel came unto you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance: having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Asia."

The consolations resulting from this source were enough to support him under the persecutions which followed. Those Jews who still remained unbelieving, irritated at the success of the gospel, collecting the most violent and profligate of the people, proceeded together to the house of Jason, a converted Jew, who appears from Rom. xvi. 21. to have been a kinsman of the apostle, and with whom Paul and his companions lodged. This they furiously assailed, intending to seize these holy men, and deliver them to the rage of the populace. Providence, however guarded the apostle; but not finding him, they dragged Jason and some other believers who were with him before the magistrates, declaring that Jason had received and encouraged some incendiaries and seditious persons, who, after disturbing the peace of the world, had dared to come even to that capital, and who had treasonably opposed the Roman emperor, in declaring that there was another king, one Jesus, to whom they owed unreserved allegiance. Their malice and art were shown in this accusation. They do not declare that it is a question concerning their religion for which they detest these disciples. This, they knew, would not have answered their end, since the Romans, in their provinces, allowed a tolerance of all religions. They therefore represent the apostle and his associates as state criminals. Precisely thus it was with those who accused our Redeemer before Pilate, crying, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend. He that maketh

himself a king, is an enemy to Cæsar." Besides, this accusation was doubly malicious in those persons, who execrated the Roman government, and rejected the gospel, because it did not, according to their wishes, present them with a Messiah who would act as a temporal prince, and deliver them from their servitude to this empire.

The magistrates, however, unlike to those of Philippi, appear to have acted with firmness and prudence. Having examined into the accusations, and found that "the kingdom of Jesus was not of this world," and did not interfere with the authority or privileges of Cæsar, they dismissed Jason and the brethren. The Christians, however, solicitous for the safety of Paul and his companions, sent them away by night to Berea, a neighbouring city. From intended evil Providence ever brings good to the church. The gospel had been sufficiently established in Thessalonica to flourish without the presence of Paul. He is therefore sent by the malice of the ungodly to plant it in a place where it was unknown.

The apostle, far from abandoning the Jews, who had treated him with so much unkindness, entered immediately into the synagogue at Berea. The Jews here listened to him with an attention, a candour, and a seriousness, that he had not yet found among them, acknowledging the importance of the subjects on which he addressed them, and hearing him without prepossession, and with minds open to conviction. As *men*, they were willing to be instructed in truth connected with their dearest interests. As *sinful men*, they felt that the tidings which the apostle announced, that there was a Redeemer who could deliver them from sin and misery, deserved their examination. As *Jews*, they were disposed



diligently to inquire whether, according to the declaration of these teachers, that Messiah, promised to their nation, had actually appeared. And while they showed this honest disposition of mind, they also proved their wisdom by “searching daily the scriptures, whether these things were so.” Interesting as were the tidings brought to them, they would not receive them till they had carefully examined into their truth, and diligently compared the predictions of the Old Testament with the character and conduct of Jesus of Nazareth. All that Christianity requires is a candid and faithful examination; it dreads no scrutiny; it challenges inquiry; it esteems those its best disciples who search into it most deeply. The persons who reject it are never those who, like the Bereans, candidly and carefully study it; but those who, through bigotry or indolence, refuse honestly and profoundly to try it. No wonder then that many in this place believed, both of the Jews and proselytes, and honourable women, now become far more honourable than they were by birth or descent.

Ah, brethren! why do we not more closely imitate these Bereans, when we come to hear the word of God; and, laying aside prejudices and prepossessions, test all doctrines by the scriptures? Why do we not with them daily study the holy volume, that our knowledge, our graces, and our consolations, may be augmented?

How implacable is malice! how furious that hatred which masks itself under the cloak of religion! The Jews of Thessalonica, hearing of this success, pursued the apostle hither. They succeeded in inflaming the minds of so many, that the brethren, apprehensive for the life of Paul, conducted him to Athens. Timothy and Silas, against whom less en-

mity was excited, continued for a time in Berea, that they might be useful in confirming the disciples that remained.

Athens was the most learned city then in the world, and the resort of thousands who came thither from all parts of the Roman empire, for the cultivation of the arts and sciences. By these, even after its subjugation to Rome, it acquired as much celebrity as it had formerly done by its arms and valour. It was noted for its temples, its statues, and other works of art. But Paul came for far more important objects than the cultivation of human science, or the examination of those exquisite productions of art, which have extorted praise from so many. He came to instruct the inhabitants in divine knowledge, in the science of salvation; to make their souls the temples of the Holy Spirit, and to prepare them for the temple in the heavens, and to re-impress upon them the image of the Highest.

His heart was moved within him with sorrow and indignation when he looked around him, and every where beheld such striking proofs that the highest cultivation of the human mind was consistent with the grossest idolatry; that "the world by wisdom knew not God." He therefore, not only addressed the Jews in the synagogues, attempting to lead them to the Redeemer, but also all those whom he met in the chief places of public resort. Some philosophers of very opposite sects, the Epicurean and the Stoic, endeavoured to hold him up to the public ridicule and contempt. The former sect supposed that the world was made by chance, that Providence was a fiction, that there was no distinction between good and evil, that futurity was a dream, and that pleasure was the chief good: the latter taught that

all things were regulated by fate and a blind necessity; were filled with the most insupportable pride, while they affected an austere morality. But though thus different, they united their efforts against Paul, as Pilate and Herod, though formerly at enmity, concurred for the death of the Redeemer. Finding that the apostle was not to be silenced by their scoffs, they brought him to the Areopagus, or Mars' Hill, a place frequented by the Athenian philosophers and poets, by travellers and strangers. This was also a place of judgment, where the Areopagites decided the causes that were brought before them. To them was especially committed the care of religion, that the national worship might not be impaired, and no new gods introduced, without the public permission. Their severity in executing this part of their office is proved by their condemning to death Protagoras, Anaxagoras, Diagoras, and Socrates. Hither Paul was led, probably that he might have a greater number of hearers, and that the Areopagites might be nigh to inquire into his doctrine, if it should prove contrary to the national faith.

Paul immediately addressed the assembled multitude in a speech admirably adapted to their sentiments and character. In speaking to the Jews, he always took for granted the creation of the world by God, his unity, his superintending providence, our need of a deliverer, and the other great truths acknowledged by that nation. But in speaking to the idolatrous Gentiles here and at Lystra, he was obliged first to establish these fundamental points of all religion.

As it was a capital crime to introduce any new god without the consent of the state, Paul, with much prudence and address, referred to an inscrip-

tion which he had observed, "To the unknown God," which proved that they were much devoted to the worship of invisible beings; for thus the word which we render "too superstitious," should be translated. Thus the word is used by the ancients, and thus it is used by the apostle, since his address is conciliatory, as far as it could be in consistence with truth. This altar is mentioned by many of the pagan writers. To whom it was dedicated is disputed; for reasons, the complete development of which would be more suited to a critical disquisition, than to these lectures. I suppose it was to Jehovah, the God of the Jews.

The apostle declares, that it was this God, confessedly unknown to them, although they had erected an altar to his honour, whose nature, will, and perfections, he came to announce to them; that it was he who made the world and all things in it; and that therefore, this system did not, as the Epicureans among them imagined, spring from chance; nor was it eternal, as the Peripatetics, some of whom were undoubtedly present, taught; that being the universal Creator, he could not, as was the popular belief of the pagans, be confined to temples made with hands, nor need for his happiness the services of mortals; these being required, not for the preservation of his beatitude, but because they are our duty, and contribute to our felicity; that he had made of one blood all nations, causing them to descend from a single man, and therefore, that proud and frequent Athenian boast, that they were children of the earth, and derived from no other people, was unfounded: that he had created them that they should seek after him; that their false sentiments respecting him did not proceed from their distance from him, since he

gave and preserved to them life, movement, and being, and continually exercised his providence over them, instead of being confined to heaven, as the Epicureans taught; that the representations even of their own poets, showed the absurdity of pretending to represent him by statues; that though he had hitherto borne with this false worship, he now called upon all to repent, and had appointed a day in which he would judge them in righteousness, by Jesus Christ, whose divine commission he had confirmed, by his resurrection from the dead.

Hitherto they had heard him with attention; but as soon as this doctrine was mentioned, he was interrupted by the mockery and sneers of some; while others, perhaps doubting, declared that they would hear him again on these subjects. He was dismissed, however, without punishment. Few appear to have been converted; but among these few was Dionysius, a member of this august court, and Damaris, with whose history we are unacquainted.

Let us conclude this lecture, by merely hinting at a few practical inferences:

1. We see that enmity which, from the introduction of sin, ever has subsisted between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, the ungodly, and the pious. Wherever Paul went, he was persecuted by those who were not converted. This enmity still subsists; wonder not then, believer, if you are exposed to the reproaches and insults of the enemies of religion. You tread in no new path; but in that which was traversed by all the pious. You experience no peculiar trials; but those that have been felt by patriarchs and prophets, by apostles and martyrs, by all the redeemed.

2. We see in this chapter, the different effects of

the word of God. "It will not return void:" "It will be either the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death." Like the same fire which melts the wax, but hardens the clay, it will either soften the soul, or render it more obdurate. The probability of the salvation of those who were not brought to the Saviour by the preaching of Paul, was far less than before they listened to him.

3. The situation of Athens, sunk in the grossest idolatry, notwithstanding the refinements of science, teaches us our obligations to divine revelation. The meanest and most illiterate peasant in a Christian land, has far more sublime and correct ideas of the nature and perfections of God, than the profoundest philosopher who ever existed, and who was left to the lights of unassisted reason. This is a fact which cannot be denied by any, who are only moderately acquainted with the writings of antiquity. And to what is this owing? Why are we, in these respects, so much better informed than the sublime Platos, the wise Socrateses, the acute Aristotles of antiquity? It is owing only to the gospel of the blessed Jesus. And will we not then prize and love this gospel? In vain does the infidel say, that without the scriptures he can form a correct system of religion. His doctrines are derived from those scriptures which he rejects. This is proved by the undeniable fact, which I repeat, that there never was a rational scheme of religion formed in any single nation, unenlightened by the gospel. When, therefore, rejecting the scriptures, he would substitute for them another plan, "he is a dwarf mounted on the shoulders of a giant; and vaunting that he can see further than a man of ordinary stature. He is a thief, impudently pretending to rival or eclipse the splen-

dour of another man, by a display of those riches which he had previously purloined from him.”\*

4. The self-sufficient philosophers, elated with a conceit of their talents, laughed at the doctrines of the cross. The same spectacle we have seen in every age. For though many, of the highest intellectual powers, have esteemed it their glory to lay all their literary laurels at the feet of Jesus, many others have, with these Athenians, scoffed at the truths of religion. Neither is this wonderful; there is something in the pride of talents that as much indisposes the heart to the humble and self-abasing doctrines of the gospel, as the pride of wealth, or of office. It is hard for one, eulogized by his fellow-men, to confess that he knows nothing of divine things, and to sit as an ignorant learner at the feet of Jesus.

5. Yet do not, on this account, suppose that Christianity is inconsistent with science. Paul himself is a proof to the contrary. His is a name that the ranks of infidelity would be proud to enrol among its votaries; he every where, as well as in this address, shows his acquaintance with the literature of his age. Like him, improve your minds; but like him, bring the treasures of Egypt to adorn the tabernacle of God.

6. The philosophers looked down with supreme pity and scorn upon Paul, as one unworthy their regard. But their names have long since been swept into oblivion by the lapse of ages, and the systems which they advocated have sunk into merited contempt; while millions have pronounced and will ever pronounce his with joy, and nation after nation shall receive the gospel which he preached, till it be

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\* Dick's Essay, page 203.

adopted by the whole world. Would you have, then, permanent glory? "Seek that honour which cometh of God only;" Seek to have your name enrolled in the Lamb's book of life, and it shall survive the ruins of the world.

7. But, alas! though the gospel is worthy of "honourable women," and of Areopagites, is not the Lord to many an "unknown God:" are there not thousands who have no practical, saving knowledge of him? Oh! let such at last awake; though the past years have been times "of ignorance" when God has borne with you, yet the day is coming when Jesus shall judge you in righteousness. Oh! do not, like the Athenian philosophers, dismiss these truths with a sneer, or defer the consideration of them to a future period; but, like the Bereans, examine, believe, and be saved.

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## SERMON LXX.



LIFE OF PAUL.

No. VI.



ACTS xviii. xix.

IN our last lecture we heard the apostle addressing the Athenians. He appears to have had but little success in this city, and departed from it for Corinth, proverbially one of the most licentious and debauched cities of Greece. At such a place, it



would be supposed, he would have but few converts; that the gay, the dissipated, and the profligate, would reject the gospel with scorn; but he went forth in the strength of God, and from his two epistles, we perceive that a numerous church was here formed, and many of the most vicious reclaimed. Here he met with Aquila, a converted Jew, who originally was of Pontus, a province of Asia Minor, near the Euxine sea. To him and his wife Priscilla, who had both been lately banished from Rome for their religion, by the decree of Claudius, Paul joined himself, working with them as a tent-maker; for, among the Jews, it was the custom to instruct all, even those who devoted themselves to literature, in some trade.

Though he faithfully and warmly exhorted the Jews, especially after the return of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia, yet they, instead of submitting to the gospel, opposed him, and blasphemed the blessed Redeemer. Paul, moved with a holy indignation, shook his garments to cast from them the dust, thus showing that he would have no fellowship with them, in testimony of his grief, and as a token that God would thus cast them off for their rejection of the gospel; and exclaimed, "Your blood be upon your own heads: I am clean." There is probably here a reference to Ezekiel xxxiii. 4, 5.; and in both places to the mode of laying hands on the heads of the sacrifices for sin, in token of the transfer of guilt. It is as though the apostle had said, 'I have warned and exhorted you; I have seen the vengeance of God advancing to you, and have sounded the trumpet: if the sword fall upon you, on yourselves must be your blood; you reject that only sacrifice which

can take away your guilt, and you must therefore perish!

He then abandoned the synagogue, and preached in the house of one Justus, a religious proselyte. Here Crispus and many others of the Corinthians were brought to a knowledge of the truth; and Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, Gaius, and Stephanas with his family, were baptized. (1 Cor. i. 14. 16.) But though Paul still continued to labour, he did it in much apprehension and grief: thus he himself declares, (1 Cor. ii. 3.) that he had been with them “in weakness and in fear, and in much trembling.” But while thus melancholy and disheartened, the Lord spake comfort to him; he appeared to him in a vision, and assured him of his presence and protection, of deliverance and success: “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.” This was enough, and more than enough, to cheer the heart of Paul. Assured that his labours should not be in vain, and that the kingdom of Christ would here be extended by his ministry, he disregarded all personal afflictions: knowing that the shield of Omnipotence was thrown before him, he did not fear what man could do unto him.

But his labours were not confined to Corinth; the care of all the churches was upon him, and he addressed at this time to the church of the Thessalonians his first epistle. From Thessalonica he had been driven by the violence of the Jews, and the Christian converts there had so suffered from their persecutions, that Timothy had been sent thither to comfort and establish them. His heart, being warmed by the favourable accounts of Timothy, who had

lately returned to him, he writes to them this epistle, to induce them to persevere in the Christian faith, notwithstanding the persecutions which he told them they should endure for the profession of the gospel, to urge upon them the chief duties of a religious life, and to support them by the most consolatory arguments on the death of their friends. This, though not placed first in order, was the first epistle which Paul wrote, and was sent A. D. 52. As some expressions in it had been misunderstood, and had been supposed by the Thessalonians to intimate that Christ was soon to appear for the judgment of the world, Paul, while he remained at Corinth, wrote to them his second epistle, in which he corrects their error, shows what must precede our Lord's coming to judgment, and labours still further to confirm them in the faith and practice of the gospel.

Paul, having continued here a year and six months, met with another severe persecution. The Jews, indignant at his great success, dragged him before the tribunal of Gallio, the governor or proconsul of Achaia, and the brother of Seneca, the heathen moralist. To his carnal mind, neither the law nor the gospel appeared at all interesting: "he cared for none of these things:" and yet he was moral, decent, and mild in his external deportment.\*

One of the leaders in this persecution appears to have been Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, who was afterwards converted to Christianity, and is mentioned with affection by Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians. So easily can God change a persecutor into a saint!

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\* Vide Seneca, *Quest. Nat. lib. iv.*

Paul still remained for a considerable time at Corinth, and hence probably wrote the epistle to the Galatians. This church had been troubled by some Jewish teachers, who had represented the authority of Paul as inferior to that of those who had attended the Saviour on earth, and who had inculcated the necessity of observing circumcision and the other institutions of the Mosaic ritual. The apostle therefore proves to them his apostolic commission, and fully illustrates the important doctrine of justification only by faith in Christ.

Having taken an affectionate farewell of the brethren at Corinth, he departed taking with him his friends Aquila and Priscilla. At the neighbouring port of Cenchrea, he shaved his head, in consequence of a vow he had taken,\* probably because of some special mercy or deliverance by God. At Ephesus he preached with success, and though tenderly beloved and earnestly implored to stay, he went forward in the discharge of his duty, separating from his friends. Having visited the church of Caesaria in Palestine, he went up to Jerusalem, where he had wished to be at the feast of the passover, that he might meet his friends, and have an opportunity of preaching the gospel to the crowds that attended that festival. He returned to Antioch, whence he had set out. Here terminated his second apostolical journey, A. D. 53.; and, by means of it, the gospel was extensively spread, Christian churches being planted in the most important cities of Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece, whence religion might easily be propagated in the adjoining towns and villages.

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\* Cave says, but I think incorrectly, that it was Aquila who had taken this vow.

Having made this tour, he took up his residence for some time at Antioch; but before the expiration of the year, he commenced his third apostolical journey, to preach salvation through the Redeemer in Asia and Greece. Having regularly passed through Galatia and Phrygia, confirming the churches which he had there planted, he came to Ephesus, a place well known for its idolatry. Here new conquests were made to the Saviour, and a church formed, to which he afterwards addressed an epistle, which still cheers and instructs the believer. Here he found certain disciples who had been baptized by John into the faith of the Messiah, but who had not known the transactions of the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost was given as the proof of the Saviour's ascension. These were probably native Jews of Ephesus, who having been in Judea twenty-two or twenty-three years before, had received the baptism of John, and regarded Jesus as the Messiah, but who knew nothing of the resurrection and ascension of Christ; or converts of Apollos, who knew only John's baptism. Paul baptized them in the name of Jesus, and, by the imposition of hands, conferred on them the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I acknowledge that it is to me surprising that any one who reads this narrative should suppose that the baptism of John and Christian baptism were the same. If they were, by what authority did the apostle repeat the ordinance?

According to his usual plan, Paul first addressed the Jews, and endeavoured by every means to lead them to the Saviour. After finding them hardened by the labours of three months, he entered into the public school of Tyrannus, and announced the gospel for two years, not only to the inhabitants of Ephesus, but also in the neighbouring cities, and in

the country round about, so that all proconsular Asia had an opportunity of being acquainted with the truths of religion. His doctrines were attested by the most splendid miracles; the most obstinate diseases were healed, and evil spirits ejected by him.

Ephesus was noted above all the cities of antiquity for its devotedness to magical arts; hence the phrase, *εφεσια γραμματα*, so often used by the ancients, denoted certain mystical spells and charms, whereby they pretended to heal diseases and expel demons. Among other pretenders to this art then in the city, were certain Jews; and we know, on the authority of Josephus, that there were many of this nation who, at this time, professed to be exorcists. Seven sons of Sheva, chief of the priests, seeing the miracles wrought by Paul, and supposing there must be some powerful charm in the invocation of the name of Jesus, repeated it over a demoniac, saying, "We adjure thee by Jesus, whom Paul preacheth." The titles and attributes of the Saviour cannot be sported with, with impunity. The man in whom was the spirit leaped upon them, and had nearly destroyed them for their presumption. This event produced a solemn awe and reverence for divine things; those who had used magical arts felt their sinfulness, and brought and burnt those books which treated on these subjects, cheerfully making a sacrifice of fifty thousand pieces of silver.

While at Ephesus, messengers came to Paul from Corinth, describing to him the schisms and heresies that had taken place in that church. In consequence of this information, he wrote the first epistle to the Corinthians, in which he asserts his apostolical authority, reproves those who endeavoured to divide

them into parties, persuading one to be for Paul and another for Apollos, as if religion consisted in being of this or that denomination, and in opposing all who do not belong to our narrow sect. As these false teachers had taught that the doctrine of the resurrection was only metaphorical, Paul asserts and proves the doctrine of a proper and literal resurrection, answers a variety of questions that had been proposed to him concerning the Lord's supper, spiritual gifts, marriage, abstinence from the feasts of idols, and similar subjects; and describes his own prospects and opposition: "A great door and effectual is opened to me, and there are many opposers." (1 Cor. xvi. 9.) Soon after this he also wrote his epistle to Titus, who was now at Crete, in which he gives him direction for his conduct, and the execution of the duties of his office.

In every place there are those whose habits, pursuits, and professions, interfere with the progress of religion. Demetrius, who derived large wealth from forming shrines, resembling the temple of Diana, perceiving his profits diminished from the conversion of many from idolatry, raised a furious mob against the apostle and his companions. When these last were seized, Paul would have rushed among the populace to address them, but was prevented by his friends. With difficulty the town clerk or recorder restored order, by an address full of moderation. Such fury, however, was excited, that it became proper for him to leave Ephesus: and, therefore, having taken an affectionate leave of the disciples, he departed to Macedonia. To this he probably alludes in 2 Cor. i. 8, 9.: "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure

above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life; but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.”

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## SERMON LXXI.



LIFE OF PAUL.

No. VII.



ACTS xx. xxi. xxii. xxiii.

AFTER the tumult that had taken place at Ephesus, Paul left that city. He first called together his Christian friends, and bade them an affectionate farewell.

Who can leave a place where he has long resided, without paying the kindest testimonies of regard to those with whom he has enjoyed communion with Jesus, and “gone to the house of God in company;” especially when the relation, as in the present case, is that of a minister who has converted them, and of those who are hereafter to be his “joy and crown?”

Paul left Timothy behind him, and, on his departure, gave him the charge of the Ephesian church. He then visited all the congregations in Macedonia which he had formerly planted, confirmed them, and received their contributions for the afflicted and poor saints at Jerusalem. He afterwards went into Achaia, or Greece, properly so called: Corinth be-



ing his chief object. He wrote hence his epistle to the Romans: he had never preached in that city, but felt deeply interested in the welfare of that church. Christianity had been propagated there chiefly by converted Jews, who wished to impose the Mosaic ceremonies on the Gentiles. He therefore treats in it particularly of the great doctrine of justification by faith alone, and of the mystery of the calling of the Gentiles. Having spent three months at Corinth, he resolved to sail hence to some port in Syria, whence he might directly go to Jerusalem; but hearing that the Jews had resolved to waylay and kill Paul, and probably rob him of his contributions, he resolved to return by Macedonia. He came to Philippi, and leaving it immediately after the passover, arrived after a voyage of five days at Troas, where the messengers from several churches to Jerusalem (verse 4) were waiting for *him*, and Luke who accompanied him. There he remained a week, and hence probably wrote his second epistle to the Corinthians. Titus had informed him of their state, and of the good effects of his first letter upon them. He in this more fully vindicates his apostolical character, and treats of many particular cases. About this time he wrote his epistle to Timothy,\* from which it appears that the gnostics had already begun to disturb the church of Ephesus. Paul warns him against them, and gives him much excellent advice respecting himself and the care of the church.

On the Lord's day Paul preached to the Christians at Troas, and administered the sacrament of the supper. As he was to depart the next day, and expected never to see them again, he continu-

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Priestley supposes that he wrote it before, while in Macedonia.

ed speaking till midnight. He desires, before he departs from them to correct all their errors, to heal all their divisions, to give them all the consolations of the gospel. All the tenderness of his heart is excited, and he is insensible of the lapse of time. He is an affectionate father, ready to quit his dear children, anxious to say every thing that will preserve them from the snares around them; and knowing that if his instructions are now ineffectual, they can never be repeated.

A youth who was present, Eutychus, overcome with drowsiness, fell from the window in which he sat, which was in the third story, to the ground. He was taken up dead. Paul, stretching himself upon the body, like Elijah and Elisha, was convinced that his prayer for his restoration would be heard, and therefore confidently said to those around, "Trouble not yourselves; his life is in him." To the surprise and joy of the assembly, he was perfectly restored. A new motive was given for belief in the Saviour, and a striking monument presented of one of the dearest hopes of the Christian, the resurrection from the dead. No wonder that they were ready still to listen to Paul, and that, returning to the upper room, he prolonged his conversation till daybreak, when he took of them an affectionate farewell.

He next morning departed for Assos, a seaport town at a small distance, whither his companions had gone by sea; and passing by several places, arrived at Miletus, not touching at Ephesus, because he was anxious to reach Jerusalem by the feast of Pentecost. He sent, however, for the elders of Ephesus, and, on their arrival, appealed to themselves to testify with what fidelity and diligence he had laboured among them, so that their destruction

could not be owing to him; declared that though those who were endowed with prophetic gifts foretold that bonds and imprisonment awaited him, yet this did not move him; that he was ready to suffer and die for his Lord; that they should see his face no more upon earth; that it was necessary for them diligently to attend to the flock, since heretical teachers would arise, and many, even among themselves, rend the church. After a beautiful and touching exhortation, he knelt down and prayed with them. They parted with many tears, especially because of the assurance that they should meet no more till they mingled round the throne of their beloved Saviour.

Though the spirit of prophecy has ceased, yet how often, in parting with those whom we esteem and love, are we forced to entertain the same apprehensions! Let us then, like the apostle, part with such as are Christians by solemn and tender prayer.

After this sorrowful separation, Paul embarked, and passing by several places, arrived at Tyre. There he met with several Christians, who were under a prophetic impulse, and who again warned him of the trials and sufferings which he should experience if he went up to Jerusalem. Every motive made the Tyrian believers desirous of detaining Paul; their esteem, their gratitude, their own interest, and that of the church. How can they think, without being penetrated with sorrow, of the dangers, perhaps of the death, of one who lives only for the salvation of others and the glory of his Divine Master? But the apostle, without hesitancy, prepared to encounter all difficulties in the discharge of his duty; and the firm purpose of his soul was unshaken by their warnings and entreaties. Having

stayed with them a week, he took of them a tender farewell, kneeling down with them upon the sea-shore, offering up their united supplications to the Lord, and mutually embracing each other. Having saluted the church at Ptolemais, Paul came to Cæsarea, where he stayed with Philip the evangelist, one of the seven deacons who were first solemnly set apart to this office by the apostles, and who had been driven from Jerusalem by the persecution of Saul, at the time when he was ravaging the church of God. Philip had first gone to Samaria, where he preached the gospel, and converted the officer of queen Candace, and afterwards had fixed himself at Cæsarea. What a consolation for the good man to receive into his house, as a friend and as a Christian, one who had formerly been the most cruel enemy both of Jesus Christ and his gospel!

It was indeed a happy family, since the four daughters of Philip were not only believers, but had also received the supernatural and miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. Whilst there, Agabus, a prophet, who had come from Judea, in conformity with the oriental genius and the manner of the ancient prophets, by an outward symbol represented the afflictions which awaited the apostle. Taking Paul's girdle, he bound with it his own feet and hands, declaring that thus the apostle would be treated by the Jews at Jerusalem, and thus delivered at first to the Roman governor, and afterwards to Nero, the Roman emperor. His fellow travellers, as well as the Christians of Cæsarea, earnestly besought him to abandon the intention of going to Jerusalem: but no personal apprehensions could at all influence him. Not that he was insensible to the tears and entreaties of those to whom he was united by the

ties of affection and the bonds of grace : on the contrary, his language displayed the most tender sensibility, as well as perfect resignation to the disposals of Divine Providence : “ What mean ye to weep, and to break my heart ? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” They sorrowfully desisted then from urging him, commending him to Divine Providence, and crying, “ The will of the Lord be done.” Let believers thus always remember that nothing occurs without the direction of God, and then the most painful events will lose their bitterness. Who should govern the world except he who created it ? Can we wish a surer, a more affectionate guide ? Departing immediately, they arrived at Jerusalem, A. D. 58, at the feast of Pentecost, eight years before the famous Jewish war, and took up their residence with Mnason, whose honourable character it is, that he was an “ old disciple,” piety and years uniting to render him venerable. In this city Paul had persecuted the Saviour in the persons of believers. He returns to it that he may show his homage to the Son of God, and give his nation a proof of the sincerity of his faith. Entering into the house of James, the apostle, Paul related to him and the other ministers present the success with which God had blessed his labours among the Gentiles. At this intelligence their hearts were filled with adoring thankfulness to their merciful God and their exalted Saviour. James however informed him, that though the Lord had so manifestly blessed his labours, there were many Jewish converts at Jerusalem who entertained strong prejudices against him. Attached to the ancient law, and zealous for the Mosaic ceremonies, they had heard with anger that wherever he had preached he had exhort-

ed the Jews to renounce circumcision and the other ritual observances, and they now with uncharitable suspicions were watching his conduct. James therefore advised him, in order to prevent disturbances which might distract the church, to unite himself to four men, who had bound themselves by a vow to perform certain ceremonial observances, probably because of their deliverance from some peril, or the attainment of some remarkable blessing. The apostle complied with the advice, not from any personal fear, or a temporizing spirit: his whole history prevents such a supposition, but from a regard to the unity of the church, and from a desire not to offend the weaker brethren in things which were indifferent.

Having already begun to comply with the rites usual on such occasions, some Jews who had come from Asia, and probably had there opposed him, raised a violent tumult against him, called out to the other Jews for their assistance, represented him as every where propagating doctrines utterly subversive of the Mosaic law, and as profaning the holy temple. These misrepresentations highly exasperated the people. Paul was immediately seized by the populace, and they were about instantly to deprive him of life, when Lysias the Roman officer interposed with an armed body, and rescued him. Supposing, however, that he was a notorious malefactor, the governor ordered him, according to the prediction of Agabus, to be bound with two chains, while the furious multitude, panting for his blood, cried, "Away with him!" and with difficulty were prevented by the soldiers from assaulting him.

While entering the castle Paul obtained permission to address the people. In the most candid and

ingenuous manner he recounted to them his former history, appealed to themselves in proof of his former persecuting spirit, gave a minute account of his conversion, and of the commission given to him by the Saviour, to go and carry the gospel to the Gentiles. Hitherto the Jews had listened to him, but no sooner did he thus assert that the religious privileges which had been conferred on Israel were now to be granted to other nations, than with every mark of abhorrence, of contempt, and of fury, they rent their clothes, and cast dust in the air, as though he had blasphemed, and cried, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live!"

Lysias, supposing from their rage that he was highly criminal, though not able to understand the nature of their accusations against him, commanded him to be brought into the castle, and scourged till a confession was extorted from him. The lictor was already binding him for this purpose, when Paul pleaded his privilege as a Roman citizen, whom the laws prohibited ever to be scourged. Lysias was alarmed at having exceeded his authority, and the next day caused his chains to be taken off. Anxious, however, to obtain fuller information concerning him, he convoked the sanhedrim, and ordered Paul to be brought before it. Firm from conscious innocence and the supports of God, Paul maintained that though brought thither as a criminal, his conduct had been marked by integrity. With a base perversion of justice, Ananias, the high-priest, ordered those who were near him to smite him on the face, thus endeavouring to silence him, and prevent him from vindicating himself. The Saviour before an iniquitous tribunal had been treated in a similar

manner. With all that gentleness which ever distinguished his conduct, he meekly replied, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil, but if well, why smitest thou me?" (John xviii. 23.) Paul, however, showed perhaps something of the weakness and infirmity of human nature, when indignant at this insult, he immediately exclaimed, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall! for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" He however instantly corrected and apologized for the hastiness of his expressions; declaring that he was unacquainted with the office of Ananias, for it was now twenty-three years since he had been in the confidence of the chief rulers of the country, and therefore many of them must have been unknown to him; but he spoke doubtless by a prophetic impulse, and his prediction was verified by the singular and speedy destruction of Ananias.

Perceiving that the council was composed of pharisees, who strenuously maintained a future resurrection, and of sadducees, who denied it, Paul declared that it was for maintaining the leading doctrine of the pharisees, the resurrection and its consequences, that he was summoned before them. This declaration immediately excited much commotion in the assembly: the pharisees showing an inclination to favour and release Paul, fearing if an angel or the Holy Spirit had made a revelation to him, they by their opposition would be found fighting against God. So great were the contests between the different parties, that Lysias, fearing for the safety of Paul, ordered him to be removed from the bar by a band of soldiers, and conducted back in safety to the castle.



In his confinement, the apostle was probably oppressed with apprehensions that his usefulness was about to be terminated. To console him, however, the Lord appeared to him in a vision, and assured him that, notwithstanding the malice of his enemies, he should not only behold the triumphs of the gospel in Jerusalem, but should also proclaim it at Rome.

Thus encouraged, the apostle was composed even in the midst of the dangers which appeared to thicken around him. Forty of the Jews, provoked at the slow proceedings of the sanhedrim, entered into a criminal combination, and bound themselves neither to eat nor drink till they had killed him. The chief priests and the elders concurred with them; but though the scheme appeared well concerted, it was discovered through the watchful providence of God. Lysias immediately sent Paul under a strong guard to Cæsarea, the residence of Felix, the governor of the province, where he was confined in Herod's hall, till his accusers could follow him.

## SERMON LXXII.



LIFE OF PAUL.

No. VIII.



ACTS xxiv.

IN our last lecture we beheld Paul sent by Lysias to Felix, the Roman governor of the province, for his trial. The hatred of the Jews impelled them shortly to follow him, and in five days from the time that he was first seized in the temple, Ananias, the high priest, and some other members of the sanhedrim, came down to Cæsarea to prosecute him. They were accompanied by Tertullus, as an advocate. In a speech, disgraced by the injustice of his cause, and by eulogiums on Felix, totally undeserved by him, he accuses the apostle of sedition and heresy, since he was a leader of the sect of the Nazarenes, and of the profanation of the temple. The Jews who were present immediately declared that the accusations were founded in truth. These misrepresentations were indeed base, but Paul was not surprised. They were experienced by the Saviour, and had been predicted by him to his disciples. (Matt. x. 24—26.)

Paul, having obtained liberty to make his defence, indulged in no reproaches, but spake with simplicity, and that confidence which truth and justice inspire, expressed his satisfaction in having to answer before one who, from having been so long the governor of the nation, was capable of judging of the pro-

priety of the charges made against him. As to the charge of sedition, he unequivocally denied it, and called upon them to prove their allegation. With regard to the accusation of heresy, whilst he modestly waived the remark, that he was the *head* of the sect of the Nazarenes, he acknowledged that he was what they denominated a heretic, but maintained that he worshipped the God of his fathers; that all that he believed was supported by the law and the prophets; and that in the hope of the resurrection and eternal life, he was careful to live conscientiously before God and man. With respect to the profanation of the temple, he declares, that though indeed he was in the temple performing there certain rites, when he had come up to Jerusalem, after a long absence, to bring alms to his indigent countrymen, yet there was nothing irregular in his conduct; and although at that time he had been accused by some Asiatic Jews of polluting it, yet the charge was totally unfounded; that they themselves had not come to Cæsarea to testify it, and that he was acquitted by the grand sanhedrim at Jerusalem of every thing of consequence laid to his charge, except by those who were sadducees, who were filled with rage because he asserted the resurrection of the dead. Such was the substance of the accusation and defence. Felix, on hearing them, declined pronouncing a definitive sentence, till he had spoken with Lysias, and ordered Paul again into custody, with permission, however, to see his friends and receive acts of kindness from them.

If this were all that we knew of Felix, his character would not appear so reprehensible; but he is next presented to us under circumstances which more clearly illustrate his real disposition. Know-

ing that Paul had brought large collections for the poor believers in Jerusalem, and seeing the warm interest that all Christians took in his welfare, he frequently sent for him, hoping that he would give him money for his release. Such baseness is not surprising in one whom history represents as infamous for his avarice, his cruelties, his robberies, his debauchery, and the general profligacy of his morals. He had caused the high priest Jonathan to be assassinated for daring to admonish him of his guilt, and then granted impunity to his murderers, which encouraged them to fill Judea with massacres.\* He had violated the laws of God and man by his shameless marriage with Drusilla. She was the daughter of Herod Agrippa the elder, and sister of Agrippa, Bernice, and Mariamne, and had been the wife of Azizus, king of Emesa, and he had allured her, in violation of duty and the most solemn engagements, to abandon her husband and the religion of her fathers, (for she "was a Jewess,") for one who, originally a slave, had risen to eminence without acquiring one noble sentiment. When recalled from his government to Rome, he would certainly have been punished with death, had it not been for the influence of his brother Pallas.†

Such were the persons whom Paul was called to address; and what was his conduct? Did he imitate the base adulation of Tertullus? Did he dis-

\* Vide Joseph. Antiq. lib. 40. cap. 6. and 7.

† Equibus [libertis] Antonius Felix per omnem sævitiam ac libidinem jus regium servili ingenio exercuit.

*Taciti Hist.* lib. 5. cap. 9.

At non pater ejus [he had been speaking of Pallas,] cognoinento Felix pari moderatione agebat, jam pridem Judææ impositus et cuncta malefacta sibi impunè ratus, tanta potentia subnixus.

*Taciti Annal.* lib. 12. cap. 30 and 54.

guise the truth, lest he should share the fate of Jonathan? Was he not afraid that Drusilla, that new Herodias, should cause him, like John the Baptist, to be killed? Ah, no! With a courage becoming an apostle of God, with a firmness and a zeal for truth, which no dangers could shake, he recalls to Felix his violated duties, and the account that awaited him in the future world. "He reasoned of righteousness," or justice to his fellow men, on the laws of which this iniquitous governor had trampled during his whole administration; "of temperance," or the regulation of all the sensual appetites and inclinations, (for the original word is thus extensive, including both sobriety and chastity,) which he had constantly disregarded in all its branches; and of his contempt of which, Drusilla sitting by him, was a proof; "and of judgment to come," where governors must appear with their subjects, and where titles, dignities, and power, cannot screen the sinner from the vengeance of God.

What effect does this plain and pointed discourse produce upon the cruel and abandoned Felix? Does it not inspire him with a rage to be quenched only by the blood of his faithful admonisher? Does not the apostle become another victim of his fury, and a monument of his disregard of law? Or does he not at least, under legal forms, deliver him up to those Jews who are so ready to destroy him? No! admire the power of divine truth: Felix, on his tribunal, trembles before his prisoner in chains! His past crimes start up around him, and point to the judgment-bar, and his soul is filled with agitation and horror. Who would not have hoped for his conversion? But, alas! his terror and affright only make him anxious to remove the object which alarms him, and to separate

from the preacher who disturbs his peace in sin. Paul trembled when he saw the light from heaven; the jailer trembled when the earthquake shook the prison; they both cried with solicitude, "what shall we do?" They were directed to the Saviour, and obtained eternal life, but Felix cries to Paul, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will send for thee." Did this season ever arrive? Oh, no! he remained still the same unjust, dissolute, cruel Felix; and there is awful reason to apprehend that he now, from the regions of despair, looks back with agony upon these despised warnings and murdered convictions.

My brethren, you pity the undone, the lost Felix. But has the unhappy secret, by which he stifled the remorse of his conscience, and quenched the motions of the Holy Spirit, died with him? Do we not see similar instances constantly among ourselves? How many who at times are terrified at their situation, but who are not converted; who defer to an uncertain future their most important interests, and are surprised by death before their projected return to the Lord? Ah! will the king of terrors listen to you, when you cry to him, "Go thy way for this time?" Ah! will the judgment linger, when you exclaim in agony, 'Summon me not yet; when I have a more convenient season, then, great God; then, neglected Jesus, I will call for you!'

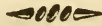
Felix, disappointed in his avaricious views, kept Paul in prison for the two remaining years of his office; and then being recalled, and desirous of conciliating the affections of the Jews, he left the apostle still in prison. He was disappointed, however, in his expectations; for a deputation of the Jews of Cæsarea followed him to Rome, to accuse him before

Nero of his crimes; and he would certainly have suffered, had it not been for the earnest entreaties of his brother, who having been the cause of the elevation of Agrippina, the mother of Nero, and Nero himself, still preserved his favour at the court.\*

Was Paul unhappy during this long confinement? No: could we know all that passed between God and his soul, all the communion that passed between his soul and his Redeemer, we might perhaps find these the happiest years of his life. His prison could not shut out the light and the consolations of heaven, nor his chains prevent his soul from exulting in that freedom wherewith Christ had made him free.

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## SERMON LXXIII.



LIFE OF PAUL.

NO. VII.

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ACTS xxvii. xxviii.

For some weeks past we have intermitted the prosecution of the life of Paul. Let us now resume and conclude it. We have marked the apostolical boldness with which he spoke before the iniquitous Felix, and the energy and clearness with which, before Festus, he displayed the firm foundations of the Christian faith, and vindicated his own character

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\* Joseph. Hist. lib. 20. cap. 7.

from the charges laid against him by the Jews. So forcible was his defence, that had he not previously appealed unto Cæsar, he would have been immediately discharged, since it was acknowledged, that so far from being guilty of a capital crime, he had done nothing that deserved imprisonment by the Roman law. But he had ardently desired and prayed that he might carry the gospel to imperial Rome, and his prayers were answered, in a manner that he did not anticipate.

He was committed to the charge of Julius, the commander of a company belonging to the legion of Augustus. Together with other prisoners, and with Luke and Aristarchus, they embarked in a vessel of Adramyttium, a seaport of Mysia, intending to coast along the shores of Lesser Asia. Arriving at Sidon, Julius, whose disposition appears to have been courteous and amiable, permitted Paul during their stay, to visit his friends on the shore. Thus strongly does a consistent piety excite the esteem and confidence even of those who are strangers to religion. Thus easily can the Lord raise up friends for his children, in their distresses. If an innocent Joseph is imprisoned, a heathen jailer may be attached to him; if a zealous apostle is sent in chains to Rome, the centurion to whom he is committed shall be induced to mitigate his woes.

Having arrived at Myra, the metropolis of Lycia, and there changed their vessel, they proceeded, continually contending with contrary winds, and with difficulty reached Fairhavens, in the island of Crete. Here, as the autumn was now far advanced, and the sailing become dangerous, the apostle advised them to remain and winter; assuring them under a prophetic impulse, that if they proceeded, the vessel and



cargo would be lost, and themselves placed in the most imminent danger. The master of the vessel, however, disregarding his advice, they again embarked with the intention to reach Phœnice, a port of Crete, and there winter. Soon, however, a violent storm arose; the gentle southern gale, which had blown before, was succeeded by a violent and tempestuous north-east wind, which raged with such fury, that they were obliged to let the vessel drive before it. Fourteen days were they in this situation, during the greater part of which time, from the thickness and darkness of the air, neither the body of the sun, nor the stars were visible. Death stared them in the face; from their terror, and the necessity of constant exertion, they could scarcely take any food; the merchandise and even the tackling of the ship was committed to the waves.

But in the midst of this peril, was the apostle alarmed? No: he knew that he was beloved by God, that death would bear him to his Redeemer, and could "with joy have embraced the peaceful wave which, when he intended Rome, should land him in heaven." Was he unhappy? No: for the season of affliction is that in which God peculiarly manifests himself to his children, and gives them the most precious and consoling evidences of his presence. While the others were agitated and alarmed, Paul addressed them with serenity and composure; he assured them that not one of them should perish; for "there stood by me this night, the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve; saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and lo, God hath given thee all them that are with thee," hath preserved their lives for thy sake. No wonder Paul was composed; for in the darkest seasons and

most dangerous storms, can we desire a firmer ground of support than God's word of promise? Never was one in a ship, except the man Christ Jesus, whom Satan would more have rejoiced to drown than Paul, at this time. But the apostle, notwithstanding the fury and the power of his adversary, can cheer his heart, and lean upon the declaration of his God. Happy for us, if we can thus look to the promises of our Father, when the waves of temptation, of corruption, of affliction, or desertion roll around us. Oh! how great are the privileges of believers! The angels of God are appointed to minister unto them, and though they no longer are visible, yet unseen they perform innumerable offices of love. As with joy they flew from heaven to cheer the tempest-tossed Paul, so with delight they hasten to console many an afflicted believer at the present day. Wouldst thou desire to enjoy this privilege? Then be careful to acquire the character of the apostle, so that thou mayest truly say, "The God whose I am, and whom I serve." And whose art thou, my brother—God's or Satan's; the Lord's or the world's? Whom dost thou serve—God or his enemies? What is thy great business, thy first occupation, thy chief end? These are questions on which thy sentence will turn at the final day. Oh! now judge thyself, that thou be not then condemned. Of how much benefit are the pious even to the ungodly! Ten righteous would have saved Sodom. One Paul preserves the lives of more than two hundred and seventy. Oh! how many families, towns, and countries, have been preserved from destruction by the prayers, and for the sake of the children of God? Do you love your country, and wish it to be victorious?

devote yourselves to Jesus, and thus you will secure for it the protection of the Most High.

After the storm had continued for thirteen days, the seamen judged about midnight that they were approaching some land, and fearing to be cast upon the rocks, they anchored till the morning. Apprehensive, however, of their extreme danger, they endeavoured to escape from the vessel in the small boat. Paul, perceiving their intention, informed the centurion, that unless they remained in the ship, the rest would all likewise perish. Important instruction for us, my brethren. However firm and immutable may be the purposes and promises of God, they always suppose the use of means; and he who folds his arms and abstains from exertions because of the promise, tempts instead of trusting God, presumes instead of believes, and attempts to sanctify his sin and his sloth. In conformity with the advice of Paul, the soldiers immediately cut the ropes which fastened the boat, and thus prevented the seamen from escaping. While anxiously waiting for the light, he encouraged them to refresh themselves, and set them the example, after first devoutly looking up to God, and adoring him for his goodness.

On the dawn of day, they perceived themselves near the land, but were unacquainted with the coast. Endeavouring, however, to direct the ship into a creek, they were by the force of the current driven upon the sand, and the violence of the waves broke the ship to pieces. Alarm and dismay every where prevailed. The soldiers, according to the Roman custom, called out to kill the prisoners. The centurion, however, had become attached to Paul, and for his sake forbade the sanguinary measure, and commanded all to provide for their own safety.

They instantly complied, and all reached the shore in safety, some by swimming, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship.

The island on which they were cast proved to be Melita, the present Malta. They were treated with humanity and kindness by the inhabitants, for which they were abundantly recompensed by the benefits conferred on them by the apostle. A providential occurrence forcibly drew their attention towards Paul. Assisting in kindling a fire, a viper that had been concealed in the wood suddenly fastened upon his hand. Ah! how numerous are the avenues to death. Delivered from the fury of the sea, he would have immediately perished by the bite of this venomous animal, had it not been for the miraculous protection of God. Let us never forget that there is but a step between us and death; that when delivered from one peril, another may immediately succeed, and that without the guardian providence of the Almighty, our days may each moment be cut short by some one of those millions of causes which may deprive us of life. The inhabitants of Malta, seeing from his chain that Paul was a prisoner, and imagining falsely that this circumstance was immediately ordered by Providence for the signal punishment of this stranger, concluded that he could have been guilty of no less a crime than murder, and that though he had escaped the sea, the divine vengeance still pursued and had finally overtaken him. When, however, they saw him composedly shake off the serpent in the fire, and beheld him uninjured by its bite, they were ready to prostrate themselves before him, and adore him as one of their gods, who had descended to the earth in human form. Ah, my brethren! how apt are many, who enjoy a better

light than was known to these men, to judge of persons by the outward dispensations of Providence, and to conclude that those who are severely afflicted are excessive sinners. How often are even malignity and revenge concealed under the cloak of piety, by those who speak of the calamities which befall their enemies as the special judgments of God. Let us always remember the instruction of our Saviour: "Think ye that those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke xiii. 4, 5.)

Other circumstances concurred to increase the veneration of the inhabitants for Paul. The father of the governor was dangerously ill: Paul, in the name of Jesus, prayed over him, and he was immediately and miraculously restored to health. Others, hearing of this miracle, brought their sick to the apostle, who healed them. No doubt he profited by the regard entertained for him to lead them to the Redeemer; no doubt, with his accustomed zeal, he preached to them Jesus, and salvation through him; and there are probably very many souls in glory who, through eternity, will bless God for the shipwreck of this man of God on the island.

Having remained three months at Malta, they again embarked for Italy. Touching at Syracuse and Rhegium, they landed at Puteoli. Here Paul found a society of believers: they were anxious that the apostle should remain with them a week, that they might enjoy the benefit of his preaching and conversation, and that they might spend one Lord's day together. The centurion, with his usual humanity, complied with their request. They afterwards

proceeded by land towards Rome. The believers there, having heard that this great apostle, whose labours and character they knew, and from whom, a few years before, they had received an invaluable epistle, was approaching the city, hastened to meet him. Instead of being ashamed of his chains, they were anxious in the most public manner to testify their respect for him. Some of them proceeded to the Three Taverns, about thirty-three miles from Rome, and others to Appii Forum, fifty-one miles from the metropolis. The heart of the apostle was cheered by their presence. "He thanked God, and took courage." He enjoyed with them Christian friendship and the communion of saints, and accompanied by them, he entered into Rome with the triumphs of a conqueror, instead of the disgrace of a prisoner.

Here the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the prætorian band, or imperial guards. The others were by him put into the common prison; but Paul, probably at the request of Julius, and in consequence of the letter of Festus, was permitted to remain in a private house, with only one soldier to guard and secure him.

His persecutions had not cooled the zeal of the apostle, nor diminished his desire to propagate the religion of Jesus. Three days after his arrival, he sent to the chief of the Jews, desiring them to come to him, as he could not publicly go to them and address them. Complying with his request, he explained to them the cause and manner of his imprisonment; told them that it was for no real crime, but only for maintaining "the hope of Israel," the advent of that Messiah, and the accomplishment of that salvation, which had been promised to the Jews, and ardently desired and expected by them.

They replied, that they had received no information concerning him ; but that, as the sect to which he had attached himself was “ every where spoken against,” they were desirous of being more particularly informed of its tenets. He immediately appointed a day, in which from morning till night he discoursed with them on the subject, and proved to them, from the promises and predictions of the Old Testament, that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. His address was carried home to the hearts and consciences of some, while others continued unbelieving. The apostle dismissed them, after recalling to the impenitent an awful prediction of Isaiah, in which the Lord threatens judicial blindness and hardness of heart on those who neglect offered mercy ; and declaring, that since they rejected the gospel, he should turn to the Gentiles, by whom it would cordially be received.

The apostle continued for two years in this state of confinement ; the Emperor thus long neglecting his cause. During this time he instructed all who came to his house, and was, as appears from several circumstances, eminently useful. The members of the church of Rome were confirmed, and new converts added. So he himself teaches us, (Phil. i. 12—14.) “ I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel ; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places. And many of the brethren in the Lord waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” Among his converts at this time, was Onesimus, on whose conversion and return to his master, Paul wrote the epistle to Philemon. He also profited by the leisure

which he now enjoyed, and wrote those excellent epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews, in which he rejoices in his sufferings, and appears lifted up above all the fears of death; in which he expresses all the triumphs of the believer. Let us bless God for his chains. Had he not been confined, probably these epistles, which have so often instructed and animated believers during life, and supported them in the last conflict with death, would never have been written.

At the end of two years he was summoned before Nero; and notwithstanding the fury of this tyrant against the Christians, he was fully acquitted, and perfectly restored to liberty. "The Lord," says he, (2 Tim. iv. 17.) "stood with me and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."

With unabated zeal, he flew to proclaim salvation through Christ. He went to Spain, probably to France, and also to the various Asiatic churches which he had founded. At the expiration of two or three years, he returned to Rome, where he was again cast into prison, together with Peter, whom he met in this city.

Here, in the immediate prospect of death, he wrote his second epistle to Timothy, which contains his cool and deliberate views of eternity in that solemn moment, and the expression of those feelings, those hopes, and consolations, which cheered the gloom of his prison. He already sings the song of triumph; heaven already is let down into his soul; death approaches him with the face of a seraph; he longs to quit this world; he pants to rest in the bosom of that beloved, that ever-faithful Jesus, whose name



was dear to him on earth, whose praises he will still shout in heaven, and who now smiles upon him, and fills him with confidence and joy. Who can, with an unaffected heart, hear the aged, venerable, condemned apostle, now crying out, "I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him unto that day." "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give unto me."

He was led from his prison, and executed at the same time with Peter. While this last was crucified, Paul, as a Roman citizen, was beheaded. It is an ancient tradition that three of the soldiers appointed to conduct him to death, were converted on the way, and afterwards became martyrs of Christ. His flesh rests in hope, and is watched over by his Redeemer. His spirit, high in the climes of bliss, still shouts, "Oh the height, the length, the depth, and the breadth of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." "By the grace of God I am what I am."

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for they do rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."