

E 1297

Entero

PAROCHIAL SERMONS,

PREACHED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF HEVERSHAM,

WESTMORELAND.

BY THE REV.

ROBERT WILSON EVANS, B.D.

VICAR OF HEVERSHAM,

LATE FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE,

AND AUTHOR OF

“ THE RECTORY OF VALEHEAD,” “ BISHOPRIC OF SOULS,” &c.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

FRANCIS & JOHN RIVINGTON,

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD, AND WATERLOO PLACE.

1846.

LONDON :
GILBERT AND RIVINGTON, PRINTERS,
ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.

CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

SONS BY ADOPTION.

(Sunday after Christmas Day.)

GAL. iv. 6.

PAGE

And because ye are sons, God had sent forth the Spirit
of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father . . . 1

SERMON II.

CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

(Third Sunday after the Epiphany.)

ROM. xii. 20.

Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst,
give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of
fire upon his head 9

SERMON III.

THE VESSEL OF THE BODY.

(Second Sunday in Lent.)

1 THESS. iv. 4.

That every one of you should know how to possess his
vessel in sanctification and honour 19

SERMON IV.

THE DUTY OF WAKEFULNESS.

(Third Sunday in Lent.)

EPHES. v. 14.

PAGE

Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise
from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light . . . 28

SERMON V.

FRUITLESS REPENTANCE.

(Sunday next before Easter.)

MATT. xxvii. 4.

I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.
And they said, What is that to us ? see thou to that . . . 36

SERMON VI.

BLOODSHEDDING FOR SIN.

(Wednesday before Easter.)

HEB. ix. 22.

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood ;
and without shedding of blood is no remission . . . 45

SERMON VII.

CHRIST THE FIRST-FRUITS.

(Easter-day.)

1 COR. xv. 20.

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the
first-fruits of them that slept 54

SERMON VIII.

THE WORK OF THE TRINITY.

(*Trinity Sunday.*)

GEN. i. 26.

PAGE

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness 63

SERMON IX.

THE HOPE OF THE SONS OF GOD.

(*Fourth Sunday after Trinity.*)

ROM. viii. 19.

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God 74

SERMON X.

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SONS OF GOD.

(*Fourth Sunday after Trinity.*)

ROM. viii. 21.

Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God* 84

SERMON XI.

THE SUDDENNESS OF SIN.

(*Sixth Sunday after Trinity.*)

2 SAM. xii. 7.

And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man 93

SERMON XII.

ON REPENTANCE.

(Sixth Sunday after Trinity.)

2 SAM. xii. 13.

PAGE

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin ; thou shalt not die 103

SERMON XIII.

THE ENQUIRY INTO SIN.

(Seventh Sunday after Trinity.)

2 SAM. xxi. 1.

Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year. And David enquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites . 113

SERMON XIV.

THE PENALTY OF DISOBEDIENCE.

(Eighth Sunday after Trinity.)

1 KINGS xiii. 9.

For so it was charged me by the word of the Lord, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest 123

SERMON XV.

CHRIST THE ROCK.

(Ninth Sunday after Trinity.)

1 COR. x. 4.

For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them : and that Rock was Christ 133

SERMON XVI.

OUR STEWARDSHIP.

(*Ninth Sunday after Trinity.*)

LUKE xvi. 2.

PAGE

And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward 142

SERMON XVII.

SUBMISSION TO REPROOF.

(*Tenth Sunday after Trinity.*)

1 KINGS xxi. 20.

And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord 154

SERMON XVIII.

THE SOLDIER OF CHRIST.

(*Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.*)

2 KINGS xix. 34.

For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake 164

SERMON XIX.

SPIRITUAL IDOLATRY.

(*Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.*)

2 KINGS xxiii. 2.

And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord 175

SERMON XX.

THE LEADING OF THE SPIRIT.

(Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity.)

GAL. v. 18.

PAGE

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law . 184

SERMON XXI.

THE STATE OF THE FORGIVEN.

(First Sunday in Advent.)

ISAIAH i. 18.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord :
 though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white
 as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall
 be as wool 193

SERMON XXII.

THE LORD'S ADVENT.

(Second Sunday in Advent.)

ISAIAH xxiv. 23.

Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed,
 when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and
 before his ancients gloriously 200

SERMON XXIII.

COMMITTING OURSELVES TO GOD.

PSALM xxxi. 5.

Into thine hand I commit my spirit : thou hast re-
 deemed me, O Lord God of truth 210

SERMON XXIV.

THE CONDITION OF THE PRESENT LIFE.

MATT. xxv. 4.

PAGE

Then shall he say to them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels 219

SERMON XXV.

BELIEF AND UNBELIEF.

MARK ix. 24.

And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief 229

SERMON XXVI.

VIOLENCE IN ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

MATT. xi. 12.

And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force 238

SERMON XXVII.

THE SIN OF SWEARING.

MATT. xxiii. 22.

And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon . . . 248

SERMON XXVIII.

SPIRITUAL MADNESS.

(*Conversion of St. Paul.*)

ACTS xxvi. 25. PAGE

But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus ; but speak
forth the words of truth and soberness 258

SERMON XXIX.

QUENCHING THE SPIRIT.

1 THESS. v. 19.

Quench not the Spirit 266

SERMON XXX.

SERIOUS THOUGHTS.

(*Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity.*)

JOHN iv. 48.

Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and won-
ders, ye will not believe 275

SERMON XXXI.

FOLLOWING CHRIST.

(*St. Matthew's Day.*)

MATT. ix. 9.

And he said unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and
followed him 285

SERMON XXXII.

THE ANCHOR OF OUR HOPE.

HEB. vi. 19, 20.

PAGE

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil ; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec 295

SERMON XXXIII.

ON READING SCRIPTURE.

ACTS viii. 28.

Was returning, and sitting in his chariot, read Esaias the prophet 304

SERMON XXXIV.

THE TRUE SACRIFICE.

MAL. i. 8.

And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil ? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil ? Offer it now unto thy governor, will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person ? saith the Lord of hosts 315

SERMON XXXV.

ON JUSTIFICATION.

JAMES ii. 24.

Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only 326

SERMON I.

SONS BY ADOPTION.

(Sunday after Christmas Day.)

GAL. iv. 6.

“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

GREAT indeed is the rank and privilege of a son of God. It makes all the difference that there is between this world and the world to come, between light and darkness, between mercy and judgment. The son of Adam, that is taken to be the son of God, is taken out of the company of the rebels against God, into the company of those that adore and bless his name with thanksgiving, and perform his service with diligence, in his glorious presence. He is no longer afar off, but nigh: and he is an heir of everlasting life, receiving continually fresh and fuller carnests of the blessedness which is awaiting him in the mansions of heavenly rest. He therefore acknowledges no resting-place in this world, but confesses himself to be in it as a pilgrim and a

sojourner ; he considers his life here but as the temporary dwelling of the traveller in a tabernacle or tent ; and looks for his house and home in the better country of the world to come. There lies the end of his journey ; thither his eyes are bent continually ; there is the desire of his heart, and there he has laid up the treasure of every hope.

But he always remembers whence he has been taken ; that if as a son of Adam he was taken from the comparatively vile dust of the earth, as a son of God he has been taken into a spiritual nature out of the comparatively much viler fleshly nature. And he never foregoes that quality which procured him admission to such high privileges. And that is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. By this he was set up in his post, and by this he continues to stand ; and this faith keeps him continually in the presence of Almighty God, to whom he looks up continually for support and direction, on whose promises therefore he leans in all confidence, and whose commandments he performs with all diligence ; he stands, and yet takes heed lest he fall ; for he remembers that he is not a real son, but an adopted son. Now a real son is always a son to his father, happen what will. And having been born and bred in his house, he knows all that is required of him, and does naturally all the duties of a member of the family. He is both in form of body and dispo-

sition of mind like his father and his brethren. The rules of the house have been the habits of his education, so that he keeps them as a matter of course ; he has grown up in them, and they have become part and parcel of the instincts of his nature. Hence he does of his own pure will, and without any fear of coming short, and any perplexity about the right way, the will of his father : it would go against his nature to do otherwise.

But very different is the condition of an adopted son ; he has been born and bred in another family, and therefore under different rules ; and hence, however respectable his family may be, he cannot accommodate himself so freely and fully as he could wish, nor sufficiently know the mind of a father, whom he has not known from childhood. Much more then if he be taken out of a family whose habits are quite contrary, and disreputably contrary, to the habits of that into which he has been adopted, he must be in continual fear and perplexity. All is quite strange to him, and let him be ever so willing to accommodate himself to his new situation, still he is in continual doubt as to what he should do, and what he should not do, and is continually, notwithstanding all his watchfulness, letting out the secrets of the corrupt habits of his old family.

The son of God therefore by adoption, as every son of Adam must be, is continually taking heed against the breaking forth of the corrup-

tion of that family to which by natural birth he belongs, but from which he has been transplanted, through God's mercy in Jesus Christ, into the heavenly family of the saints of the Lord. What indeed can be more opposite than the manners and habits of the two? Were a child adopted from the most wretched hovel of the lowest beggar among a barbarous people, into the most splendid palace of the most powerful king of a most accomplished people, the difference to him would be not only inconsiderable, but positively nothing, in comparison with that which is experienced by the son of the house of Adam the transgressor, on being adopted into the house of the holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, King of heaven and earth. Has he not need then to look about him, to walk circumspectly, diligently to acquaint himself with the rules of the house, heedfully to accustom himself to its new habits, watchfully to study the mind and disposition of his new father. Can he ever forget what he has been, where he is? at least if he do, is he not, in so thinking to stand, most sure of falling?

But is it not next to an impossibility that a person born of bad parents, and brought up in their wicked habits, should either know or care how to conduct himself in a reputable family? How much more impossible then for man, born in sin, bred in sin, to be able of himself to behave himself as a member of the family of God.

But on the very account of this natural infirmity, God hath put him under an instructor, to give him the proper knowledge, to form his habits, to influence his will, and by such a thorough change, to qualify him for the duties of the new station to which he has been admitted. And this instructor is the Holy Spirit, called also, from this his very office amongst us, the spirit of adoption, as in Rom. viii. 14, 15. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Him He hath sent forth from heaven, to take his dwelling within the hearts of his adopted sons, and He there continually fashions their spirits after the spirit of the first-born son of the family, the only begotten Son of God by nature, the image of his everlasting Father, and the model to all his brethren. He creates in them the mind which was in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, took upon Him the form of a servant. He pours into their hearts the Spirit of that dutiful Son, who said, "O my Father . . . not as I will, but as thou wilt¹." And, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do²." And, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit³." And, "Father, glorify thy name⁴." And, "Father,

¹ Matt. xxvi. 39.

² Luke xxiii. 34.

³ Luke xxiii. 46.

⁴ John xii. 28.

the world hath not known thee, but I have known thee⁵." And, who "in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard, in that he feared, though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered⁶." Thus Christ is formed in them⁷, thus they are conformed to the image of his Son⁸, thus they put on the new man, thus they become partakers of the Divine nature, so as to be fit members of the new and heavenly family into which they have been introduced. Thus they have the eager desire to learn, and put forth the earnest endeavour to learn the rules of the heavenly house in which they are now abiding. They abhor and detest the vile and sinful habits of the corrupt family of the children of this fleshly world from which they have been taken, and are continually on the watch against the least outbreak of them. The very consciousness of being liable to such unseemliness in such company fills them with all the watchfulness of honourable shame: and they continually study the example of their first-born brother, strive after his likeness, keep themselves with all perseverance in his company, and so imitate his Spirit, and copy his habits.

And thus from this Spirit, and through the

⁵ John xvii. 25.

⁶ Heb. v. 7.

⁷ Gal. iv. 19.

⁸ Rom. viii. 29.

access in Christ, they have communion with the Father; they experience his acknowledgment of them as sons, they have the confidence of a good conscience, and the assurance of his promise, and the pledge of his love, and therefore boldly come before Him with the cry of Abba, Father. And what a privilege is that! it is a privilege which no son of Adam enjoyed before Christ came in the flesh. For turn over the Old Testament, examine all the prayers of the children of God contained therein, especially in the book of Psalms, and no where will you find the Lord God Almighty addressed directly as Father. And yet our Lord and great example hath taught us to say at all times, "Our Father, which art in heaven." O what a privilege is the humblest Christian enjoying above Abraham, and Moses, and David, and Elijah, and Daniel, in short, above all the patriarchs and prophets! How have the sons of God been raised up to the very fullest height of the enjoyment of the blessedness of their station, and what an exercise of exceeding favour with God is prayer in the words and name of Jesus Christ his Son.

And yet men can shut their eyes to all these things, and though the invitation go forth continually to come into the blessed family of the true and obedient sons of God, and it be acknowledged that there is no salvation out of that family, men will listen with carelessness, and even with impatience. But let us, my

brethren, thank God continually, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and that not only with our lips, but also with our lives, that He should have called us to the knowledge of so great salvation, and let us strive to make that calling sure. Let us exercise and quicken faith by being zealous of the good works through which it is manifested, and abounding in the love through which it works; and let us be faithful stewards of the manifold grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may grow up in obedience to the will of the Father, and in conformity to the example of his only begotten Son. So let us prepare ourselves with all diligence for the household of God, which at the last day shall receive in fulness of bliss all that have enjoyed the earnest of its membership in this present life.

SERMON II.

CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

Third Sunday after the Epiphany.

ROM. xii. 20.

“Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink : for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.”

CONSIDERING that we have to exercise the duty of charity, or Christian love, once at least a day, if not once an hour, it surely is not too much to preach upon it once a year¹; especially since it is among those things which men think that they know most familiarly, so as hardly to need any counsel upon it, while in general it is little really understood, and still worse practised. Our Lord has told us, that merely doing good to such as have done good to us, is no peculiar part of it, for even the heathen will do this. “If ye love them which love you, what reward have

¹ The occasion of this Sermon is annual.

you? Do not even the publicans the same²?" He says. That which a heathen can understand and do, is surely no peculiar Christian grace. No! all the Christian graces are distinguished by having in them one ingredient of which the heathen could have no notion. And that is, the self-denial of a man, as bearing the cross of Christ, according to his Lord's commandment, where He says, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me³." Now what is there to do with such denial, in merely exercising a natural affection of love and friendship, in merely following a generous impulse of disposition from full means? So far from it, that a man is merely gratifying himself, however properly, and not denying himself. And thus, as St. Paul says, a man may give all his goods to the poor, and yet not have charity. No! charity, truly, peculiarly Christian, begins where all this ends. It begins with self-denial; it comes from means which can ill be spared, it is exercised towards persons whom we have reason, according to the world, not to love, but even to hate, and is described by our Lord according to this rule, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you⁴." You see

² Matt. v. 46.

³ Matt. xvi. 24.

⁴ Matt. v. 44.

how closely the apostle, using the words of Solomon indeed, has kept to this rule in the text. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink." What a victory must be gained over the corrupt affections of the heart; how must the power of our great enemy be subdued within us; how exalted must be our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in trusting to his word in despite of all outward appearances, in opposition to our natural feeling; how fervent our love towards Him in thus keeping the most difficult of all his commandments for his sake, when we have been able to set ourselves down resolutely to follow out these words of the text. They are one of those flat contradictions which the Gospel gives to the world, which the rule and example of the spiritual man gives to the rule and example of the natural man. They are the words of heavenly wisdom, and they sound in the ear of unregenerate man as the words of the most miserable folly. What! feed the man that is ready to stab you with the very knife with which you are cutting for him? Give drink to the man who would return you a draught of poison? Yes, it is even so. There is no mistaking the words. If our greatest enemy, the man who has done us the greatest injury in the most cruel manner, come before us as a proper object of charity, he must experience it.

All this can be done, under the grace of the Holy

Spirit, only by a stern and stiff self-denial of the things which are of the affections of the natural man. But at the same time is there no gratifying of the affections of the spiritual man? Yes, surely! For we cannot deny any thing of this world for Christ's sake, without having pleasure in things of the world to come. And therefore the rule given us in the text is followed by an assurance of such gratification. You shall receive great pleasure, high gratification, for making so great a sacrifice, exercising such forbearance and self-denial, and imitating your Saviour's example, who laid down his life for a world that hated Him. And what is this? "So doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head." That is, you shall thus take the most ample and full revenge upon your enemy. The most cruel revenge in the world, even the heaping coals of fire upon the head of your enemy shall not be more complete. Thus you shall indeed be gratified.

What then does all this fine-talking end, after all, in gratifying in the fullest manner the deepest feeling of revenge? Have a moment's patience, and let us look deeper into these words.

If the feeling of revenge be so natural to the heart of man, as we must all confess it to be, then there must lie at the bottom some fundamental principle of our nature, of which it is the corrupt abuse, and not the proper use; and this

we shall find to be the just assertion of our proper rights and claims amidst our fellow men. Any injury done to us robs us of them, and then we feel impatient to regain them; and we commonly think that the only way of regaining them is to rob in turn him who robbed us, and so if he attacked our person to attack his, if he took our property to take his. But this is not the only way, no, nor the fullest way. Is not often the taking no notice of an injury or insult the deepest revenge a man can take? it disappoints his enemy, it lowers him in his own eyes, as not being thought worthy of notice, and fills his heart brim full with uneasiness and vexation, and fear of contempt. And the more so, because he is conscious that he has done wrong himself, and is therefore deeply provoked that he cannot bring the other to do as wrong also, and come down into the same low situation as himself. Thus you see how, without giving way to the least angry feeling, a man may vex in turn his injurer, even beyond the utmost extent of the injury, may indeed almost drive him to distraction, and so to say, "heap coals of fire upon his head." And he will feel gratified that he has asserted and maintained his proper rights, and yet innocently.

But he may go beyond even this, he may not only not punish his enemy, but even return him with benefit for his injuries. Then indeed the shame and confusion of his enemy is complete, then

indeed he feels his utter inferiority, and is conscious of the vileness of his conduct. Has not the man whom he injured asserted his right indeed? has he not plainly proved his superiority, instead of submitting to inferiority? Could the most cruel revenge, even the actual heaping of live coals upon the head of his injurer, set him more completely right? And there is this most gratifying circumstance in it; not only does he abstain himself from sinful passion, but he brings his enemy to a better mind. For he must be a bad man indeed who is not moved by such generous treatment, and instructed by such noble example. He has gained a victory over himself, he has gained a victory over his enemy, not a carnal, but a spiritual victory, not of the world, but in Christ; not by gratifying, but by denying himself; he has turned the bitter waters of envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, into the sweet waters of love, and peace, and all kindly affection. Such is the revenge of which Solomon speaks in his Proverbs⁵, and whose words St. Paul uses here. And if such was to be the conduct of the Jew to whom Solomon wrote, how much more should it be ours, to whom St. Paul writes.

Another example from Scripture will set this statement more plainly before us. Our Lord has bidden us take the lowest place. Then, He

⁵ Prov. xxv. 23.

says, we shall be removed to the highest, and have worship, that is honour and regard, in the presence of them that are sitting together with us. Does our Lord here bid us seek after honour? No more than St. Paul bids us seek after revenge. But we rightly think it right that we should be found in our right place, and if that right place turn out one of honour, is it not a proper subject of gratification, under humble thankfulness to Him who enableth us, and giveth all things? are we not in fact in the very work of salvation, seeking a place of honour and eternal glory? And you will observe that this very honour comes out of self-denial, as did that revenge. And we call them honour and revenge, because the language of our corrupt hearts and polluted lips has no names for them, and therefore we are obliged to give to these heavenly and spiritual things the names of the things which seem most akin to them among earthly and carnal things, though at the same time they be most opposite to them in other respects. Heavenly honour is given to him that denieth the love of worldly honour. Spiritual revenge can belong to him only who denies himself the gratification of carnal revenge.

I have thus endeavoured to explain to you as simply as possible, and to the best of my power, what has always been considered a difficult text: I will now conclude with some observations on the practice of it.

You see that the great hinge upon which charity, as well as every other Christian grace, turns, is self-denial. How can it be otherwise, when our Lord tells us that He is to be followed only by denying ourselves. Now if this be the case, Christian charity is very different from that blindfold quality which so often goes under its name: it is not easy good nature, it is not liberal indifference, it is not a thing done on the spur of the moment, it is not the indulgence of a mere natural affection, which is by mere accident a good one, but would have been equally indulged if it had been a bad one; such as these, however they may pass in the world under its name, have nothing whatever to do with it. They are of the world and of the flesh; but Christian love, or charity, is of Christ and his Gospel; and like all other Christian graces, requires the continual exercise of watchfulness, that it should have its proper seasons and proper objects; of carefulness, that it should always have a store to deal from; and moreover of faithfulness, that it should always be able to plead the message of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name all deeds must be done, or they are nothing worth, by whose help all must be done, or it is all in vain, for whose sake all must be undertaken, or it were better left alone. Thus it is that none but the true Christian can be truly charitable, in thought, or word, or deed; how can it indeed be otherwise. How can one

who is not a true Christian possess a truly Christian grace. It is a plain contradiction.

All uncharitableness, whether in thought, word, or deed, comes out of carnal selfishness. And therefore in learning true charity, we must begin (as they say all charity does at home) with the lesson of denying ourselves ; this is the very first exercise of Christian grace ; this is the very first lifting of the cross of Christ upon the shoulder, the very first step of the way on which we are to follow Him to life eternal, whither He hath gone from his cross upon earth ; and is it no mighty stirring up of our hearts to this work, to consider that if our Lord had not had charity, if He had not loved us before we could possibly love Him, if He had not bought us at the price of his own precious blood, where should we have been ? We were enemies, as aliens, outcasts from his presence, and rebels against his will. We were in utter destitution ; we were hungry, and He fed us ; we were thirsty, and He gave us drink. Shall we not go and do likewise ?

But of what use will be the privilege of this Christian education, unless we put it to account by Christian self-denial ; and having been hungry, and fed ourselves, seek to feed others ; and having been thirsty and made to drink ourselves, give drink to others. Such charity is a part of our Christian growth, being our Christian exercise ; by such charity we be-

come united in bonds of Christian unity to others ; by such charity we shall gain the victory over our own hearts, and over the heart of our enemy ; and he shall confess with the joy and thankfulness of subdued unruliness of affection, that we have heaped coals of fire upon his head.

SERMON III.

THE VESSEL OF THE BODY.

(Second Sunday in Lent.)

I THESS. iv. 4.

“That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.”

AT best a vessel is but a frail thing ; let it be of gold or of silver, time and use make flaws in it, and its day is soon past. And it is a vile thing, being the creature of the hands, and a mere instrument of the hands. To be of any use, it must have an owner, and it must always be just what its maker chose that it should be, and must ever do what its employer sets it to do ; and however it may be employed for other purposes, yet it does nothing suitably but that for which it has been first intended. The putting it to other work is generally one of the surest ways of destroying it, as when a vessel of glass is put on the fire.

Now in this text we are plainly admonished,

and a very stirring admonition it is, that our bodies are vessels : that they are frail enough, being but earthen vessels, actually made out of the dust of the earth, and mouldering down again into that dust when broken, we must all confess. And they can do nothing of themselves ; if there be not soul and spirit to put them to use, they are as lifeless and unserviceable as any other vessel of clay in this world, and are put out of the way, and hidden out of sight, just as any other useless vessel.

But then again on the other hand they are honourable and precious ; for they were made by the hand of God Himself, and He made them to contain immortal soul and living spirit, and with them the treasure of “ the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ ¹.” And they were made by Him to serve the purposes of his own honour and glory ; and like all other vessels, when put to any other service than this, they are put out of shape, broken and destroyed. In other words, we must “ possess them in sanctification and honour.”

Does not the commonest experience of the world tell us this ? does not the employment of them in the service of the world, the flesh, and the devil, destroy them ? do not the carefulness and anxiety of the world, the intemperance and impurity of the flesh, the passions of envy,

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 7.

hatred, malice, uncharitableness, vanity, ambition, coming from the devil, derange them with all manner of diseases, so that they are broken up by death? Indeed, did not Adam, in the very first moment of using his vessel at Satan's bidding, contrary to his proper service, break it up for himself and for all his children after him?

But in Jesus Christ, who took our body upon Him, this vessel has been restored to its former heavenly service; and all the baptized into his name profess to hold their bodies, after the fashion of his body, vessels of sanctification, being clean from all defilement, and vessels of honour, being dedicated to the work of his glory. But alas! all the baptized hold not fast their profession; and therefore this visible Church of God upon earth, this house which He hath built upon Jesus Christ the corner-stone, is like the great houses in the world, which contain "not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth²," and not only vessels of honour, kept with watchful care from thieves and accidents and improper handling, and used but for high and solemn occasions; but also vessels of dishonour, thrown about, and carelessly bruised, cracked, and broken, filled with all the refuse and offscourings of the house, and never seen in the rooms which are kept in decent order.

And we that are now met in this house, as a

² 2 Tim. ii. 20.

portion of his Church, we that have brought our bodies hither into one visible company, do we not present before his eye, that searcheth the heart, a vast variety of vessels of different uses, according to our different posts and gifts, but all those uses declared by our very presence here to be parts in detail of the grand use of all the service of our Lord? Yes! this we proclaim now, and every time that we meet here, if no where else, and at no time else, as clearly and as loudly as our bodies and our voices can. We are publicly and solemnly declaring that we are vessels of sanctification and honour; what other can possibly be brought forth on so solemn an occasion? what other dare we thus deliberately put before the eye of Almighty God? It is a high day with our Lord; He calls for his vessels of honour to be brought before Him, the vessels which He has filled with treasures far more precious than silver and gold, with spiritual talents, with treasures of light and knowledge. He would fain see and recognize in them vessels of his election, vessels of his mercy. What if there shall be brought before Him vessels which He has indeed made, and bought back with a great price again after they had been taken away from his heavenly house into a strange house, but emptied of their treasures, and filled with the defilements of the world, the flesh, and the devil! Can He look on them otherwise than as vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?

Will any of you, my brethren, be like the wicked Belshazzar who used the golden vessels, which had been taken out of the temple of the house of God, to drink in them, and defile them in the service of intemperance, thus rendering them unfit to be employed in his service, unsuitable for the occasions of such solemn assembly as we are now holding in his presence ?

These are serious thoughts on this sacred occasion ; are they not also most profitable ? Do you not find it always a very useful plan, when you are following out any fixed purpose of your heart, to have some part of it continually in some decided shape before your eyes. Thus it brings the whole continually to mind, and never ceases to tell you what you have to do ; it is a memorandum never out of sight ; is not this done, for instance, by the clergyman, whose plain and solemn dress of dark colour is intended to remind him every moment of his duty ? Even so carry this day of your public exhibition before the Lord, about with you during the rest of the week ; let it remind you that you are a vessel of some sort in the Church of God, and that it is the business of your life to take care that you be found a vessel of sanctification and honour, fit for the Lord's handling, fit for his eye to look upon in the day of his visitation, on the last Lord's day of this world.

Surely we never were our own ; God made us for Himself, and He hath redeemed us for Him-

self. We must therefore glorify God in our body, and in our Spirit contained in the body, both being God's³. Neither can we be Christ's, if we will not contain the riches of Christ; neither can we have any thing to do with the Holy Ghost unless we be filled with his fruits. O let none of us forget what we are, and what we are to be; let us look continually inwardly, and see what a spirit is within us, whether it be of Christ or of Satan, of the world to come, or of the world around us. Is it one which will make a right use of these our vessels of the body, that they should be sound, in all soberness, all purity, all temperance, active to the works of faith in all brotherly love, in all seeking of the glory of the Lord, edifying by good example, seen where they should be seen, and never seen in places where they should not be seen; thus kept under and brought into subjection to the will of their Maker, thus fulfilling the service for which He so fearfully and wonderfully contrived them, thus possessed in sanctification and honour? Have we not indeed a fearful stewardship? Our eternal welfare all depends upon it. According to the use which we make of the vessel of this body, will be the body with which we shall be clothed hereafter. "Can a clean thing be brought out of an unclean⁴?" And when all has been done on God's part to cleanse this vessel of our body,

³ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

⁴ Job xiv. 4.

to fit it for a place in his great house in the kingdom of heaven, even washing it with the blood of his only begotten Son, purifying it in the laver of regeneration by his Holy Spirit, so that it should be without stain of defilement, shall it be turned to a use which He abhors, made an instrument of evil instead of good, and learn the work of hell instead of the service of heaven? How shall it then be received into heaven? how shall it not find its proper and only place in hell?

Sanctification and honour, what have they to do with that careless keeping of the vessel of the body with which too many are content? In sanctification we understand a continual restraint upon the corrupt desires of the flesh, a continual gain of authority over its natural unruliness, a continual growth of experience in the way of watching over it, a continual increase of knowledge in directing it to its proper and heavenly service. In it we understand resolutions to good well kept, and followed up by resolutions to the further good which thus, by God's gracious appointment, comes into sight, and which are kept with greater constancy still; and in honour we understand the dedication of this vessel of the body to the service of the glory of God, the jealousy against the interference with any rights of its true owner in heaven, by any power of earth or hell, the watching against the many tempters which would seduce it from its

heavenly duties, and make it an instrument of iniquity to work all iniquity.

There lies thus before you the service and the destiny of these our vessels of the body. Have we not received a great charge in them? will any one use that which was given him for the drawing forth from the wells of the waters of everlasting life, in filling from the sinks of corruption, from the sewers of intemperance and uncleanness?

Not only Scripture, but the very nature of our bodies, cries out against it as an abuse. For assuredly pain, which is but the feeling of a flaw in our earthen vessel, comes sooner or later on every pleasure which it takes contrary to the law of God. In countries where poisoning was shockingly frequent, there were invented, it is said, drinking vessels of glass, which, if a certain poison was put into them, instantly cracked. Such vessels are our bodies. If we take into them the poison of unlawful and intemperate desires, immediately there is a flaw; they are all at once unsound, unable to contain the thin pure elements of the well of sanctification, but well able to hold the thick black mire of all iniquity. And where is the end? Is it only in the vessel being broken utterly to pieces by disease, and mouldering into clay again by death? Well would it be for the soul which made so bad an use of the body if things were so, and it had not to expect an eternal abode in a vessel of wrath. But you have heard this morning how

that Jesus Christ was received up into heaven⁵, and set on the right hand of God. There He sits in that body to which ours must be conformed in its affections and desires upon earth, that it may be conformed to its glory in heaven. There He bears our human body, which has thus become a vessel of the eternal Godhead, and exhibits to us the first-fruits of the resurrection of our body. O should not the prospect stir up our minds and lift up our hearts? Can any thing be imagined more glorious? But then, also, can any thing be imagined more shameful, more horrible, than the very contrary state to this? Oh, then let us learn continually to look upward with the hope of everlasting glory, and downward with the fear of everlasting shame, and thus in all diligence of service, in all watchfulness against temptation, “know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.”

⁵ Mark xvi. 19.

SERMON IV.

THE DUTY OF WAKEFULNESS.

Third Sunday in Lent.

EPHES. v. 14.

“ Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”

THESE, St. Paul says, are the words of another. Since they are not to be found in Scripture, we may suppose them to have formed part of one of the divine hymns sung in the Church of Corinth. And, indeed, they form a most suitable hymn for our lips also, and we may make an excellent application of them by pouring them forth from our hearts before the throne of Almighty God, when we awake in the morning. Then when we are rising, by the continuance of God's gracious mercy and protection from a state of darkness and insensibility, to a state of light and life, then when the duties of the day are awaiting us, and the blessed state of Christian hope, into

which we have been called, is before us again in all its brightness, and the means provided for the great work of our life, which is our salvation, are at hand, and we hear the voice of our Lord summoning us to his vineyard for another day, and thus also feel the assurance of his help and protection for another day, is not this, indeed, a time to cry out to ourselves, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light?"

But it is not bodily sleep which is here especially intended, neither is it bodily death from which we are particularly bidden to arise. He speaks of spiritual sleep, of spiritual death. And what are they? We may find them out from the comparison of bodily.

When we are asleep, we are in a different world from that in which we are awake, except that it is made up of a heap of confusion of the things of this world. But all are in a different order; and all are shifting and shadowy, and never in one stay. Then we agree to things which are most absurd and irrational; we are not surprised by things the most monstrous, while we are deeply affected by the most trifling and ridiculous. Our judgment of true and untrue, and even our sense of right and wrong, is perverted, or rather is nothing at all. In short, there is nothing so humbling to our pride of understanding, nothing so completely shows to

us the pitiful weakness of our nature, as the fresh memory of that which has passed through our minds in sleep.

Now such a world as sleep is to this world in which we are awake, such is this world in which we live and move as mere dwellers in the body, to the world in which we ought to be living and moving, as creatures exercising their affections of soul and faculties of spirit. What is this world of the body but a heap of confusion of the broken laws of God's spiritual world, and of God's falsified truth? What is it but a continual course of objects and events, which follow one on another's heels, and are no sooner come than gone, vain shadows, empty shapes? And man's heart agrees to all its folly and corruption, sees nothing monstrous in its continual violations of the order of God's laws, is shocked at nothing because it is contrary to the rule of his sovereignty. It laughs at serious things, it weeps at trifles, it judges wrong for right, it takes the true for untrue, and untrue for true. How can a man giving himself up to such a world as this do any work of real life in it, having a spiritual purpose in it, any more than he can do any work of this world in his sleep? And, therefore, St. Jude calls those who give themselves up to the vile affections of this world, filthy dreamers. But we are to serve and worship God in spirit and in truth; the Lord Jesus Christ has set us a work of the

spiritual world, and He has bidden us lay hold of, and put out to use, the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

But again : sleep is the image of death, and the sleeper is in fact as dead, for the time, to any work of this world, as the corpse. And sleep, when it becomes immoderately long, terminates in death ; and in death is no remembrance of any thing of this world. Therefore the state of habitual sin is likened unto death ; for the man that is in it is quite insensible to the things of the spiritual world, quite unmindful of God, quite incapable of any work of a spiritual and heavenly nature. And such as death is to sleep, so is the confirmed indulgence in sin to the carelessness which first gave it opportunity and exercise. The heart was asleep when it should have been watching. And then, growing in unwatchfulness, it becomes insensible of the magnitude of the offence, and thus soon comes to a deadness of conscience, and a mortal inability both of willing and of doing the law of God, and of entertaining the thoughts, and words, and deeds of his world of spiritual life and light.

This is the state to which our corrupt nature, and the world around us, continually inclines us ; it is the state in which they that resist not the inclination by watchfulness are lying. It is the state in which by far the greatest part of this world is lying.

But the Lord in his gracious mercy would rouse the sleepers. He has sounded the trumpet of the Gospel, which shall sound in the world until it shall make way for the sound of the last trump, which all must hear, whether they would hear the trumpet of the Gospel or no. And its notes are the rousing strain of the text, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." The sound has gone forth to the ends of the earth. And we this day have heard it, and often, surely, have heard it before. And He enforces it with the strokes of many warnings, and calls of sundry visitations. He would not have any of us sleep the sleep unto death. He is as one who would awake us in the morning, and say, "Rise up, here is a beautiful morning. The sun is shining bright. The birds are in full song. All proclaims a fine day for our purpose. Awake, arise!"

And what can be more enjoyable than that to which the Lord would arouse and awake every one. He awakes to a day of work in the company of fellow-labourers in the vineyard of the Lord, to a day of delights in the walk of the path of God's statutes, to a day of enjoying the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in all their glory, their strength, and their comfort; to a day of the sight of his glorious works of creation in the world of immortal spirit. To a fine day indeed, a day to which Christ, the

Sun of Righteousness, is the light, a sun which never sets; to a day which has no storms of miserable and sinful passion, no darkness of trouble, but all is the serene calmness of heavenly peace and joy. And the day is ushered in by the songs and hymns of the sons of God, and the prophets who have sung of his coming. And its close is the coming of the Son of God to pay the wages of his servants, who have been doing his work, and to receive them into his blessed company, face to face, for ever. To such a day does the Lord awake every one who hears his call, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

But our nature, in the most perfect among us, is infirm. As our Lord said, "the spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak." And if we be not watchful, we shall, like them to whom He spoke those words, be overtaken by sleep. As we see persons in the body, when they are growing sleepy, first of all shut their eyes for a few moments, then lose themselves occasionally, answer incoherently, and give sudden starts, so is it also in the coming on of sleep upon the soul and spirit: the sight of heavenly things is interrupted, at first for a short time, then for a longer; some duties are past over, and some one which should always be going on, is done faintly and by interruptions; and the neglect increases, and the interruptions become more

frequent ; they become inconsistent, giving way to the temptations which are around them ; going into a crooked path out of the strait road of the word of God, and recovering the road to fall out of it again. They are neither in this world nor in the world to come ; but now in this, and now in that, falling out of the one and starting out of the other, by fits of sin and repentance. What work can possibly be done in such a state ? How shall the work of salvation, which requires a determined purpose, a wakeful perseverance, a work which is all "yea and amen," be done in a state which is neither one thing nor another, and is yea and nay in one breath ? How shall Christ be served with a service divided between Him and the world ? How shall his promises be believed by a heart that gives part of its faith to the promises of this flattering and false life ? How shall we do any real work of God, with eyes winking in forgetfulness of his orders, and our hands folded in fits of carelessness, as of a drowsy man over his work ? Such a state of unwatchfulness is a sure introduction to the sleep of indifference, and that sleep to the death of insensibility to the will of God, and salvation in Jesus Christ.

"Awake, therefore, thou that sleepest," must be the words with which our spirit must ever be rebuking our flesh. And as a person who, having an important work before him for the

next day, makes sure provision for his waking betimes, sets up an alarum, for instance, in his chamber, so let this text be a continual alarum in our ears, let it continually cry out to our conscience, amid the dead of the night of this world, amid the slumber which every where surrounds us, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

SERMON V.

FRUITLESS REPENTANCE.

Sunday next before Easter.

MATT. xxvii. 4.

“ I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that.”

How little do men know the end of any sin, when they are beginning it! They see but a very small part of it, just that part into which they are tempted. And the tempter does all that he can to put a fair show upon this, and, at least, to make it look as small as possible. But when the sinner has been brought to commit this, then the adversary has no further interest in concealment, but takes a malicious delight in removing the veil from his eyes, and in letting him see the dreadful extent of sin into which he has ensnared him. Then the deluded man sees with horror that he has been

led to commit that which he had no notion of committing, which he would have abhorred the thought of committing. But is he excusable on that account? It lay among the consequences of his sin. But he wilfully blinded himself to the consequences, and for the very reason that he might the more easily overcome all scruples, and persuade himself to the sin. What an awful example of this is set before us in Judas! It is evident, that when he bargained to betray his Master, he never imagined that they to whom he betrayed Him would condemn Him to death; and, therefore, when he found out this, and all too late, he was in the deepest agony and horror of guilty despair. With all his covetousness, how many thousand times the thirty pieces of silver would he have given to undo the deed! Would he not have given the world itself, if he had it? But there it was, in all its horrid completeness before his miserable eyes. And there was no remedy: he had betrayed the innocent blood. That was now upon his head, and how should he deliver himself from it?

He repented himself, indeed, and he gave all the outward signs of such repentance. He publicly confessed his sin before the chief priests and elders; he made reparation to the amount of the money that he had received, bringing again to them the thirty pieces of silver, thus performing the two grand acts of a true penitent, all indeed that he can do. And this very

thing it is that makes his example so terrible. With every outward sign of being true, his was not a true repentance, otherwise he could not have gone and hanged himself. However he had changed his mind in this particular matter, his heart was unchanged on the whole. He was sorry, but it was for the consequences of the covetousness of his heart, not for that covetousness itself. He confessed; but he did not confess the secret of his heart which led him into a sin which was too open to be denied. He made restitution of that by which he had been bribed; but what sacrifice was this, compared with his offence? How little could this undo! Did he go and throw himself at the feet of Jesus, and implore his forgiveness, and, if needs be, share his cross with Him? This he had not the courage to do. Thus he did not go to the root of the matter. His repentance was ineffectual.

But how many repentances must be no better than his? Sincere repentance requires head-work to consider the true nature of the sin, and so to devise all the means of reparation. And it requires heart-work to make up the mind to the work of godly sorrow, of fixed resolution, of persevering and weeping love. It must not be a work half done, for a duty half done is itself a sin. And yet, seeing how continually it is delayed till it can be but most imperfectly done, never, in fact, really begun, how seldom can it

be available; how often must it be but the fit conclusion of a life of half-done duties!

But there is another circumstance in this account of the repentance, or remorse, as it rather deserves to be called, of Judas. The chief priests and elders who had bargained with him to betray Jesus, now leave him without pity to his fate, and insult him in his sorrow. "What is that to us? see thou to that," they say. And has not the like been said over and over again by the tempter to the tempted, when he is in despair at finding himself brought into such a depth of guilt as he never imagined? Are not instances familiar of the tempter arguing against all the evil consequences, and the nature of the sin, which rise beforehand to the mind of the tempted, and saying, "O, leave that to me, I will take care against that, and this will never happen, and that will never happen; and I will share with you the danger and disgrace, if such there shall be?" And then, when the danger and disgrace have come upon the tempted, does not the tempter reply to his complaints in the very words of these chief priests and elders, "What is that to me? see thou to that?"

It is, in fact, the answer which the grand tempter of all mankind makes himself, and therefore puts, of course, into the mouths of all his agents. He hides from the eyes of those whom he is deceiving into sin all the danger;

he varnishes over the sin with the fairest colours that it can bear ; he puts out of sight discovery, disgrace, and judgment ; he laughs at their fears as he did at those of Adam and Eve, when he told them they should not die ; he makes merry with every serious thought, and puts the end which they wish before them so clearly and so winningly, that they can see no other end, still less the deadly end beyond ; he bids them trust him, and he will bring them safe through. But when they are brought fairly into the sin, and cannot go back, when the danger is come, when the disgrace is arrived, when the sorrow has begun, then where are all these his fine promises ? Where is the security which he promised to the dishonest ? where is the health he promised to the riotous and intemperate ? where is the help and countenance which he was so forward in saying that he would give to the rebel against God's law ? All is changed. He mocks at the sinner. He answers to his cries of shame and sorrow, " It is of your own free choice, your own doing. What, therefore, is all that to me ? see thou to that ;" and so leaves him, in mockery and derision, to those consequences which he had all along been persuading him it was the greatest folly to foresee and fear.

" See thou to that." Yes, the sinner against the law of God is left alone ; he has all the burden to himself ; he finds it insupportable : but

who shall share it with him? He who led him into sin and promised to bear a part, throws it all upon him in all its heaviness. He was told that the whole burden was light; but he finds himself weighed down by it to the dust. There is only one that will or can share his burden with the sinner; and that is He on whom the Lord laid the iniquity of us all, who bore our sins upon the cross, and who says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. . . . For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." He will see to that; He will ease the conscience of its burden, if it be indeed laid upon Him in all the faith of true repentance. He will not say, "What have I to do with that?" He has everything to do with it; for, for this very thing He came into the world, to save us from our sins. His promises are sure; his help is effectual; He has pity and compassion for the sinner; and so opposite is He to the tempter, that He was Himself tempted by him, that He might thus become "a merciful and faithful high-priest, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people¹." Hear his voice, who speaks from heaven; see how He describes sin; how clearly his holy word sets it before us in all its real hideousness, in all its unavoidable consequences of death and judgment to come. See how that word unravels all the windings of its

¹ Heb. ii. 17.

error, tells us to avoid this turning, to beware of that, to keep the straight path, not to stop on the road, and loiter and listen to any other voice, for every other is that of sin. But if with all this light, with all these promises, with all this help, a man shall wilfully go on in sin, then can he wonder at the fulfilment of that terrible threat, "Ye have set at nought my counsel, and would none of my reproof. I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh²?" Then indeed, but not till then, He also says to him that would now lay his sin upon Him, merely because he has wilfully enjoyed and run out all its pleasure, and now most unwillingly fears its necessary consequence of pain, "What is that to me? See thou to that."

What a terrible example therefore is this of Judas! He was the first traitor among the followers of Christ; he stands at the head of all who crucify Him afresh, by sins against the light of conscience, the knowledge of his word, the warnings of his Spirit. He was the first in whom was manifested the impossibility of being renewed unto repentance. And when we consider that he was continually in the company of Christ, constantly heard the lesson of solemn warning against sin, the promises of the world to come, that amidst all this the thought of betraying his Master arose in his heart, amidst

² Prov. i. 25, 26.

all this he could go on and cherish it, and look upon and talk with Him whom he was going to betray, are we not most fearfully warned of the power of sin over the heart of man? see we not good reason that the Lord should repeat his warnings and say, "And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch³?" Judas was among those whom He called *you*. We are among those whom He calls *all*. Let us watch, therefore, lest amidst the full light of God's Church, amid the tokens of his presence, and the means of his grace, amid the hearing of his word, and the sounding of his promises, we also let sin grow up in our hearts to a deadly power of destruction to the soul. Who is safe of us, that cannot see and hear Christ face to face, when one that saw and heard Him face to face daily for three years, could fall so dreadfully? When one out of the twelve that companied in the flesh with the Lord Jesus could come to such an end, is there no danger to one out of twelve, that is, to seventeen millions out of the two hundred millions, who at this day profess to be his followers? Is there not very great danger? No one that is living in unwatchfulness can say that he would not have done as Judas did, and therefore may not sin after the similitude of the sin of Judas; he may betray the innocent blood, which was shed for sin, by making it of no account, no more

³ Mark xiii. 37.

than that of any other man, no more than if it had never been shed for him. And then his repentance may be nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. So then, let us remember the fearful import of the words, whether they come from Christ in rejection, or from Satan in derision, "What is that to us? See thou to that."

SERMON VI.

BLOODSHEDDING FOR SIN.

(*Wednesday before Easter.*)

HEB. ix. 22.

“ And almost all things are by the law purged with blood ;
and without shedding of blood is no remission.”

I NEED say nothing on the former part of this sentence, which has immediately to do with the ceremonies of the Law of Moses, except so far as it is concerned with the latter part, which tells us, what we learn also from other parts of Scripture, that neither before the Law, nor under the Law, nor after the Law, neither to the patriarch, neither to the Jew, neither to the Christian, is there remission, that is, forgiveness of sin, without shedding of blood. Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock to offer unto the Lord. The grand trial of Abraham was the offering his only son instead of the usual sacrifice of a beast. The tabernacle and temple streamed with the

blood of sacrifice for sin ; and the Christian continually entreats forgiveness through the preciousness of the blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross, which blood was the fulfilment of all the blood which had been shed in sacrifice from the beginning of the world. In his blood alone lay the virtue of remission of sins, which God was pleased to convey to his faithful beforehand through the type of the blood of lambs, and bulls, and goats. Verily, "without shedding of blood is no remission" of sins.

But is not this a most tremendous sight, most appalling consideration ? What must we think of sin ? Whether we look at it in commission or remission, all is blood. In commission, his own blood is on the head of the sinner, who has thus put himself under the sword of the judgment of God. In remission, there is blood for blood, the blood of the Son of God, a ransom, not only for the blood, not only for the life which the blood is, but for the life everlasting to come, that he might not perish, but have everlasting life. O what a change hath sin wrought in the spectacle before men's eyes ! There is a disease of the sight, under which green always appears of the colour of scarlet. Now green is the colour of nature in all her most delightful freshness ; so Adam in his health of innocence saw nothing but in its natural state of loveliness in which God blessed it, and pronounced it good. But as soon as he fell off, and the disease of sin dis-

ordered his nature, all appeared under the crimson and scarlet of blood, of the blood of the death which was now his due, to his eye in sorrow for sin ; of the blood, which was to redeem that blood, to his eye in hope of forgiveness ; and ever since, to every child of his, that hath come into the adoption of a child of God, all that is truly precious to him, all that is truly lovely, all that he looks upon in faith, in hope, in peace, in love, in joy, is seen under the crimson colour of blood, even of the bloodshedding of the Son of God, without which is no remission of sin. His sins indeed, being forgiven, though as scarlet have become white as snow, though red like crimson have become white as undyed wool. But he can perceive this whiteness only through the blood of his Saviour ; and in the moment that he loses sight of that blood, he has nothing to do with the remission of sin.

Is not this all an awful spectacle ? Are we not thus brought indeed into sight of Christ crucified, pouring forth from his precious side his most precious blood, as “ a lamb without blemish and without spot ; who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for us, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, that our faith and hope might be in God¹ ? ” And what are we without this dreadful

¹ 1 Pet. i. 19, 20.

and yet joyful spectacle before our eyes, and where are we? Can we too frequently and too deeply consider?

First of all, then, as to the dreadfulness of the sight. Dreadful indeed it is. O! who shall abide in sin and endure it? for it is God's manifest proclamation of judgment upon sin, "Sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, he hath condemned sin in the flesh²." Could He have condemned it more openly? could He have cursed it more deeply, "whose only begotten Son was made a curse for us³?" Will He spare the impenitent sinner who spared not his own Son, "but delivered him up for us all⁴?" Do you not see the depth of the pit of his judgment manifested by the very height of the throne of his mercy? Does not the length to which He has gone in redeeming man, most evidently declare the length to which He will go in judging man, if He shall continue in impenitence? Oh, it is a time indeed to tremble for all who are going on in old courses of sin, and in the carelessness and security of a sinful world forgetting their Christian profession, of "having been washed from their sins by Jesus Christ in his own blood⁵."

O my brethren, may every eye amongst us be enlightened thus to see what sin is; not as man represents it, who trifles with it, bears with it,

² Rom. viii. 3.

⁴ Rom. viii. 32.

³ Gal. iii. 13.

⁵ Rev. i. 5.

excuses it, thinks that he can put it off as easily as he can put it on, and grows so blind with its delusions, that to his eyes this minister of darkness is transformed to an angel of light: but as God has represented it as having death, eternal death for its wages, as under the curse of his wrath, as reserved for his judgment in public spectacle before heaven and earth to witness at the end of the world. Can the heart too deeply consider the dreadful import of the words, "without shedding of blood is no remission?" Do we not all hope for remission? The most careless man alive, if he be not a professed unbeliever, will say that he does. Alas! perhaps he perversely sins upon this very hope. Then why not all look to the shedding of blood, without which it cannot be? There he that hopes for forgiveness must see, and acknowledge his part and interest in the condemnation passed upon sin. He must not shrink from the dreadful sight; he must not turn his face away from the appalling spectacle of seeing his own sins there openly exposed to his sight in all their hideous offensiveness to God, nor turn a deaf ear to their cry for blood that goes up unto the judgment-seat of the Lord. Murder has been committed! The blood of Christ has been shed! And why? Because of sinners, and by sinners. He then that will not confess in it his own share of sin, but continues in sin, does he not put himself among the shedders of the blood of Christ?

There can be but two parties in the matter, they that forsake sin, accepting a share in that blood as a ransom; and they that abide in sin, and take their share with the shedders of that blood. Is it not a matter of eternal life and death to us, to see that we do indeed belong to the one of these parties, and be not on any account found in the other? Without shedding of blood there would have been no remission of sin; but without shedding of blood there would also have been no condemnation of sin.

But now, in the next place, let us come to the joyful part of the spectacle, and behold the manifestation of the exceeding love of God, who hath given us his only begotten Son to be the propitiation of our sins. Hear that precious blood, not crying from the ground, like Abel's, for vengeance, but speaking better things than his, speaking of peace with God, of redemption and forgiveness of sins, and crying out in the perfect fulfilment of the words of the Prophet, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool⁶." "For the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth from all sin⁷." How, indeed, is its language altered in the moment that, having been convicted by its threatening, we humble ourselves to take refuge in its promises. Instead of de-

⁶ Isa. i. 18.

⁷ 1 John i. 7.

nouncing us as sinners against God, it pronounces us sons of God; instead of bowing down our heads in horror to see the pit of the wrath of God's judgment yawning at our feet, to swallow us up for ever, it lifts them up in joy, to see the mansions of the inheritance of the saints in light.

In such Christ dwells in their hearts by faith; in such the old man is crucified; in such sin is dead as to his power. "They are washed, they are sanctified, they are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God^s." Such, and none others, are the inheritors of the kingdom of God.

Thus then, since repentance and faith make up the sum of Christian life, repentance by which he continually subdues the power of sin that ever seeks to rise up again, and faith that holds fast to the promises of forgiveness, the spectacle of bloodshedding, without which is no remission, is ever before the Christian's eyes. And now is it not easy indeed to answer that question, which was put in the beginning of this discourse, what is a man, and where is he, if he be living without this spectacle before his eyes? It is plain that he is not a man of God, he is not a believer in Jesus Christ, he is not a partaker of the Holy Spirit; on the contrary, he must be far from God, and Christ, and the

^s 1 Cor. vi. 11.

Spirit. Neither is he in the kingdom of heaven upon earth, nor amid the fellowship of the Saints, and in the company of the children of God; He is in a very different kingdom, in a very different fellowship, in a very different company.

And therefore, is it not every thing to us, that we should live in the daily spiritual sight of this bloodshedding, without which is no remission of sins, having our ears and hearts open to its cry? O shall that most awful appeal which we have joined in making, as gazing on this very sight, this morning, "By thine agony and bloody sweat, by thy cross and passion, by thy precious death and burial," shall this be to any one so much unmeaning breath? And yet it is, and worse too, to every one who does not hold these things seriously in view, and is not purposed in his heart to live accordingly. Consider then, every one, the spectacle which should be before us; remember how it threatens and condemns our old man, before it will comfort and assure our new man. How terrible then to be awakened and gaze upon it for the first time on a sick bed; to hear its sharp rebukes, its thundering denunciations, its stern and angry questions to the conscience, its terrifying answers to the anxious search for consolation, at a time when the heart is in need of every support. Let this stage be gone through in health, and then sickness will have the unalloyed comfort

of that which comes after. Yes, let life ever be ordered, let death ever be expected, with a continual reference to that awful truth, that “without shedding of blood is no remission.”

SERMON VII.

CHRIST THE FIRST-FRUITS.

Easter-day.

1 COR. xv. 20.

“ But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.”

CHRIST is risen! what joyful news He has brought up with Him from the grave and hell. He announces to us that He has accomplished his work of redemption. The Father has received his sacrifice for sin; death has been vanquished, and hath no more dominion; Satan has been overcome; the image of God has been fully restored to man; he is again a son of God, and is raised to be an inheritor of heaven. O break into singing all that mourn, and into laughter all that weep under the miseries of this sinful world. Christ is risen! and from one end of the earth to the other, the Church of

God proclaims the news, and rejoices with exceeding joy.

But he has also become the first-fruits of them that slept; that is, his resurrection is the pledge and earnest of the general resurrection of the dead. For the first-fruits were the choice of the crop, and were solemnly offered unto the Lord as an acknowledgment that He is Lord and Giver of all. Even so Christ, having first risen from the dead, has presented Himself before the Lord, who is the giver of life, and "having life in Himself, gave unto the Son to have life in Himself¹." And in Him acknowledgment is made of life and immortality to the children of men. All shall rise at the last day, and be clothed with their bodies again.

But will all that rise enter into his joy? If they rise after his likeness, but not otherwise. The crop, from which the first-fruits were picked, was not all of the same quality. There may have been wild grapes and fruit of brambles amid the crop of the vineyard; and there may have been tares and thistles among the crop of corn. Should these be gathered into the barn also; should they not be cast away, and burnt in the fire, and none but what are of the same kind as the first-fruits, grapes and corn, laid up in store? So it will be at the harvest of the resurrection of the dead. A separation will be made, and none but such as are like to Christ

¹ John v. 26.

the first-fruits will be admitted into the kingdom of heaven. The rest will be cast into everlasting fire.

There is, therefore, much to warn us in this word "first-fruits." It admonishes us that we must be conformed to the likeness of the Son of God, before we die and go into the earth, if we expect to arise as sons of God after his likeness. That which goes into the ground as seed of bramble or thistle, will rise bramble or thistle; so he that goes into the grave a child of wrath, will rise a child of wrath. These are awful considerations, which well become this present occasion, when we ought to ask of our hearts whether they do indeed inwardly feel, and with good reason, that joy which the Universal Church of Christ outwardly expresses; and if they, and not our lips only, utter the hymns of triumphant thanksgiving for the peculiar mercy of this day?

(1.) First, then, let us bear in mind that which is the grand property of every thing that bears fruit, growth. As all men bear fruit of some kind, whether good or bad, whether of the spirit or of the flesh, they are growing up from something, and they are growing up to something. What, then, is the seed in our hearts from which we are growing? Is it the good seed of the word of God? It is easy to determine, if we will but take common pains to examine. The manner of the plant's growth declares its seed. Is there in the heart a

spreading forth of the love of God, is there a continual rise, as if of lively sap, of the sense of the mercies in Christ, of the experience of the earnest of his promises, of the motions of the Holy Spirit, of the promptings of good thoughts, godly meditations, heavenly affections? Is there the shooting upwards of the stem of the seeking of God, the believing in Christ, the hoping of the good things to come, the raising of the desires? Is there the shooting downward of a good hold of faith, of a rooting in love, of a seeking of spiritual nourishment? Is there a shooting sideways into branches of love toward the brethren, of exercise in good works, of example to edification? Who can doubt the seed of such a plant? Who is not assured that it can be none other than that of the good word of God? And who is not certain of its bringing forth fruit to the honour and glory of God, and joy of our Lord Jesus Christ, fit to follow the first-fruits which He has presented?

But, on the contrary, if the heart rise and swell with the motions of ungodliness, if there be no shooting upward but of rebellion against God; if there be no shooting downward but of carnal desires, earthly affections, devilish inclinations; no shooting sideways but of works of unfruitfulness, of carelessness of living, of bad example to the brethren, of indifference to the honour and glory of God; who can doubt the seed of this plant also? Who does not know

that it is the bad seed sown by the devil in the heart of man, when he was asleep in the unwatchfulness of this world? And who is not certain of the nature of its fruit, that it will be a sour, a bitter, a deadly-poisonous berry, to the shame and scandal of the vineyard and field of God in which he has been suffered to grow up?

And what is the fruit to which we are growing. I have partly described it. But let us examine it more at length; and here observe, that there is this great difference from the former case. There can be no doubt of a plant bearing its natural fruit; but there may be a doubt of its bearing fruit at all. Though the seed be of grape, or fig, or wheat, the vine may be blighted, the fig may be barren, the wheat may be mildewed. But so it is, that we hardly ever see worthless plants disabled from bearing fruit. Who ever saw the thistle blighted? It is the valuable fruits that are so uncertain, and the more precious they are, so much the more tender they are, and require greater care to bring them to perfection, for they are not in their natural climate. And is the sinful world the natural climate for the precious fruits of holiness? No: all ungodliness thrives in it, blossoms without fail and in all abundance, and brings forth fruit most plentifully. No one who sows to that ever misses his crop, or has to complain of blight and scarcity of fruit; he has only to let it have its own way, and it will overrun the soil with fruitful

shoots and rank branches. But how different is it with the plant which comes up in the heart from the seed of the word of God. The heat of temptation, the cold of indifference, the blight of unbelief, the floods of ungodliness, are all against it; and it requires to be nursed carefully, watched continually. And if we pray against unfavourable seasons as to the fruits of the earth, how much more reason have we to pray against the continual perils which threaten the fruits of the Spirit. If therefore we be indeed growing up to them, then we are watchful for the seasons of God's grace, watchful against the seasons of the world's temptation. We are industrious in seeking increase to our faith, and abundance to our labour in the Lord: we let no day pass without looking well to that which is growing up within us, and training it according to God's will.

(2.) And, in the second place, let us remember that on our growth, whether for good fruit, or for evil fruit (and we must grow to one or the other), depends our place on that day, when there shall be the gathering of the harvest of which Christ is the first-fruits, having risen first of all that sleep in death. Our characters are decided for holy or unholy on the day that we go into the grave; our place is decided, for happiness or misery, on the day that we rise out of it. Who can think of either of these days without deep and serious ponderings of the

heart? And the time that lies between them is called a time of sleep. Not that then the soul is insensible, the spirit without understanding; for both are living still. But because the night is then come, our work is then done, and our bodies are laid down to rest in the grave until the morning of the resurrection, when they will awake at the sound of the last trump. No wonder that men who have laid up their all in this world should not be willing to enter upon such thoughts as these. No wonder that they among the Corinthians who were awake to sin, and asleep unto righteousness, denied, as we find from this chapter, the resurrection from the dead. But do not all deny it in their hearts who are not preparing for it? for then they dare not look at it, but they put it out of their thoughts as far as possible, wilfully striving to forget everything that should put them in mind of it, however remotely and indirectly. It is astonishing how watchful some men are in keeping out such thoughts; it would be well if others would be as watchful in keeping them in. But what is the difference between denying a thought to a thing, and denying the thing itself? Only a difference of words, where works, as here, are in question. A person may indeed look forward to a happy resurrection without attaining it, because he may delude himself with false hopes; but no one will ever attain a happy resurrection without looking forward to it. Why? It is the

very end of our life's labour, the prize after which we are striving; it is our light in our darkness of affliction, it is our hope amid worldly despondency, it is our stay amid the fleeting things of this world; without a thought of it, we are without a thought of Christ who is the first-fruits: and not only things within are continually reminding us of it, but things without never cease to admonish us. See the seed fall into the ground, and rise up a plant; see the life of spring come out of the death of winter; see the butterfly come out of the coffin in which the caterpillar was laid.

Oh, how fast, how wilfully, must a man shut his eyes, who will not be reminded of the resurrection of the dead! How gross must be the darkness which he brings upon himself!

But now is Christ risen from the dead: He has given the example of the resurrection by his resurrection, as He will give the signal of the resurrection by his coming in glory; and all that are asleep in sin, must arise unto righteousness, that they may be ready for his coming. Blessed were the virgins who were ready for the Bridegroom; blessed was the servant whom the Lord, when He came, found doing his orders; blessed were they whom their Lord, when He returned from the wedding, found waiting to open unto Him. These the Lord Himself has proposed as figures to us, that we may seek and attain a blessed resurrection from the dead.

Then He spoke upon earth ; but hereafter He shall speak from heaven, and utter a sentence which yet depends, under his grace, upon ourselves, whether it shall be, “ Come ye,” or “ Go ye,” a blessing or a curse.

SERMON VIII.

THE WORK OF THE TRINITY.

(*Trinity Sunday.*)

GEN. i. 26.

“ And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

WHEN our sovereign says “we” of herself, she intends to say that she is acting with the advice of counsellors, according to our free constitution; but when God Almighty says “we” of Himself, where are his counsellors, and where are the bounds to his authority. As Isaiah says, “Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or, being his counsellor, hath taught him¹.” And, as this chapter tells us, “He erected heaven and earth.” Therefore He is absolute ruler over all; He cannot therefore say “we” of Himself in the same sense as our kings of the earth do in these times, and as they never did (it is

¹ Isaiah xl. 13.

worth while to remark on this point) in ancient times. What can be the meaning then? is there more than one God? This very passage speaks of Him as one, and Moses, who wrote it, says elsewhere to the children of Israel, "The Lord our God is one Lord ²." But though God is one in substance, may He not be more than one in person? Yes. This is the doctrine of Scripture, and according to it, when we are admitted into the Church of God, and baptized in his name, we are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

This doctrine lies at the very foundation of our faith; for if Christ was not very God, it were possible for Him to sin, and therefore impossible for Him to offer the sacrifice for sin. And if the Holy Ghost were not God, however holy, He could not be a maker of holiness, and therefore could not discharge his office of sanctifying the people of God. It must therefore indeed be kept whole and undefiled, and such as corrupt it corrupt the Christian faith to the very core, and come under the severe denunciations which Scripture pronounces on all such; not that we are required to bear continually in mind those minute distinctions which you have heard in the Creed this day; they are directed against the errors of men who have looked into the deep

² Deut. vi. 4.

things of God—among which this is the deepest to us—too curiously and irreverently, and therefore gone wrong, and done exceeding mischief in the Church by unsettling belief; it is to prevent such mischief happening again, that the Creed has been formed and is read. Meanwhile it is enough for every single-minded and teachable spirit to believe that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are three persons and one God, without going into any minute and curious distinctions; but as all men neither are nor ever will be of such a spirit, it is the duty of the Church, as “the pillar and ground of the truth³,” (as St. Paul says,) to set forth from time to time the truth of the doctrine in all those articles upon which serious errors have been made and preached.

Three persons in one God! It is indeed a mysterious doctrine; but is man, who was made by this one God in three persons, and after his image, less a mystery, when we come seriously to consider Him? He also is one, and yet three; he is one man, but he is made up of three distinct things, body, soul, and spirit; this we never could have conceived, if it had not been the fact. For it is much more easy to conceive fire and water mixing together than two things so infinitely more contrary as body and spirit; yet here they are, joined together with the soul

³ 1 Tim. iii. 15.

into one man in wonderful harmony in every one of us. Truly they who complain of mysteries in religion, should first clear up the mystery that is in their own selves.

And now consider what a glorious creature was man when first put together, in all his proper perfection, by God his maker. His body was indeed taken out of the dust of the earth, as to the flesh which it has in common with all animals, but it was entire, without a single flaw for death to enter by ; his soul came from God, pure in its affections as the snow, without a single speck of sin upon it. His spirit came also from God, free, without a single link of the chain of sin upon it, clear in understanding as the noonday sun, upright, and confident as became the spirit of a son of God.

He was indeed a glorious creature ; and therefore Satan, the evil spirit, desirous ever of destroying God's work—and the more desirous the fairer the work—resolved upon his ruin ; and how completely he effected it, we are especially experiencing at this very moment, in this very place. As for the body, we are met where we are surrounded by the bodies of the dead, which we expect ourselves sooner or later to join. As to soul, we are making a sorrowful confession of its sinful, corrupt affections. As to spirit, we are deploring its darkness and unbelief. Oh, what a change indeed ! what an unfathomable fall ! what an irreparable ruin !

But is no change back again possible? is there no rising again from the fall? cannot the ruin be repaired? "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up his tender mercies⁴?" O no! He is a God that doeth wonders, wonders of love as well as wonders of power. He has created man anew in Jesus Christ; He has restored to him his own image, his own likeness. He hath said once more, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." And the blessed Trinity hath been at work once again: the Father hath sent both his Son and the Holy Spirit into the world, and the Son hath satisfied his justice with his own blood on the cross, that the soul of man may be spotless in the sight of God; and the Holy Spirit hath renewed him with the washing of regeneration, that his spirit may be life because of righteousness. And he can pray, with the certainty of his prayer being heard, that his "whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ⁵." And according to this condition also we profess to be now met here.

Such is the high calling of God in Jesus Christ our Lord; it is a new creation, according to which we are each to be the new man, having put off the old, created after God, after his image and likeness; and this image has been set before us that we should be

⁴ Psalm lxxvii. 9.

⁵ 1 Thess. v. 23.

conformed to it in body and in spirit, and through precept and example. There is the precept of the Word of God, speaking as a father to his children, and crying out, "Ye shall be holy, for I am holy⁶," and teaching us truth, warning us against falsehood, cleansing our hearts, questioning our consciences, enlightening our understandings, filling our souls with love, and our spirits with conviction; and there is the conspicuous example of the Son of God, who is the image of God, showing how his brethren, of whom He is the first-born, are to be conformed to his image, and become "partakers of the Divine nature through glory and virtue, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust⁷."

"My Father hitherto worketh, and I work⁸," said the Son of God our Saviour, speaking of his unremitting work upon earth for the salvation of men, without even the rest of the Sabbath-day. And the Holy Ghost worketh, dividing his heavenly gifts severally to every man as he will⁹. And we are invited to the work, our own work for our own selves, to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling¹." Is there any other work like it, any other work to be compared with it? Look at any work of this world; it is but for that which perisheth; it is uncertain of success in proportion as its object

⁶ Exod. xi. 44.

⁷ 2 Pet. i. 3, 4.

⁸ John v. 17.

⁹ 1 Cor. xii. 11.

¹ Phil. ii. 12.

is precious, and in the same proportion we need the help of fellow-workers. How different in all respects is the work to which God calls us, and condescends to take a part in as his own work, though it be entirely for our sakes ! It is for the body, that it may be raised a glorious body ; it is for the soul, that it may not be destroyed in hell ; it is for the spirit, that it may join the spirits of just men made perfect in the general assembly and church of the first-born under God, the Judge of all, and Christ the Mediator of the new covenant. It is as certain as the promise of God and word of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, however heaven and earth shall pass away, cannot pass away. We have for helpers in it, the three persons of the blessed Trinity, each in his several heavenly office, each almighty and everlasting. Where is a work for us to be compared with this ? Should we not reasonably expect that the whole body of mankind, the moment they heard of it, would run eagerly to it ? that they would combine to accomplish this work, which is begun indeed upon earth, but ends in heaven, at least as zealously as they combined to raise that Babel of brick and slime from earth to heaven ? Then God cursed the work, and confounded their language ; here He blesses the work, and in the unity of the Spirit, gives one mind one mouth. Shall it be heard and seen less than any other that is going on in the world, and crowds that

through the haunts of business and pleasure pass by the places of devotion? O, how little can God be thought of, when his likeness is so little coveted! how dim must his glory be to their eyes, who set no value on conformity to his image! Surely, we are always proud, when we are told how like we are to some one whom the world highly esteems; and yet, how many are ashamed of the likeness of God, and afraid of being thought serious, and showing the marks of conformity to the image of his Son! Does not this prove, indeed, the corruption and folly of the natural heart of man? The prophecy of Isaiah is surely too true, not only as to the Jews, but as to us Gentiles also, when he said of Christ, "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him²."

But none but the sons of God can enter into the glorious and everlasting kingdom of the only-begotten Son of God; and none will be reckoned for sons of God, but such as bear his image, as a child is like his father. Will any one then continue in the likeness of the children of this world, which must perish? The world may approve the likeness, as a parent may see beauty in the ugliest child; but God is to be our Judge, and therefore to please Him, and not the world, must be our endeavour. And will

² Isa. liii. 2.

any form of sin please Him? No; we must be entirely changed from that; we have, indeed, all been shapen in iniquity from our mother's womb; but in that shape none shall be accepted of God; we must be renewed in the spirit of our minds unto true holiness, and daily grow more and more into his likeness by forsaking old sins, and attaining unto new and heavenly qualities. This is not the work of a day. Our heart slowly and unwillingly opens the door to let out sin, and take in holiness; and firm and healthy growth is always by little and little; and as the child growing like its parent commonly resembles him first in one feature, then in another, and day by day becomes a more exact image of him, so do the children of God grow. Sinful unlikeness is dropped daily, holy likeness is acquired daily; and on the last day the likeness shall be perfected at the resurrection of the dead, when this body of sinful flesh shall be replaced by a body of glory.

Such is our own proper work to which we have been called. What, indeed, is man, that God should have so cared for him? twice he has come forth from the creating hands of the blessed Trinity, twice after the image of his Creator. When he had not kept his first estate of innocence, God gave him a further trial, with fresh means, by sending his only-begotten Son into the world to reconcile him unto God. But we must remember that it is the last; having

healed man from his sickness unto everlasting death, Christ has said to him, "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee³." So there remains no more sacrifice for sin, when we have trifled away with this: we shall, indeed, return into the hands of the blessed Trinity for a third and last creation at the resurrection of the dead; but will God then say of all men, "Let us create man in our own image?" No; those only that have striven after conformity with the image of Himself in his blessed Son, will then be born into eternal glory in his image. The rest will rise to everlasting contempt after the image of him whom they have served in all ungodliness and disobedience, after the hateful likeness of Satan, which the sons of God shudder at and loathe. Now then, while yet there is time, let the Father be sought and found in his only-begotten Son with the light of his Holy Spirit; now, even now, before it be too late, let the Father be worshipped in spirit and truth, through the access in his only-begotten Son, and the adoption of the Spirit; let the Son be adored with the love which keeps his commandments; let the Holy Spirit be served with a faithful stewardship of his heavenly gifts: thus let the unity in Trinity, and Trinity in unity, be worshipped, not by a mere distinction of names, but by an ear-

³ John v. 14.

nest and intelligent application to ourselves of their several offices to the work of salvation; then God will be with us in all his fulness here, and we shall be with Him eternally in the world to come.

SERMON IX.

THE HOPE OF THE SONS OF GOD.

Fourth Sunday after Trinity.

ROM. viii. 19.

“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.”

HERE is summed up the grand concern of life, here is announced the end of all our hopes; it is the manifestation of the sons of God: but is it indeed made the end of all our hopes? Do all care to understand what is even meant by the words? It is simply this: that all the children of God, who are God's workmanship, “created in Christ Jesus unto good works¹,” are looking forward continually with the steady eye of earnest expectation “to the great day when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels²,” and the election of

¹ Eph. ii. 10.

² 2 Thess. i. 7.

the sons of God and heirs of eternal glory shall be declared, and they shall be manifested to the eyes of angels and men, shining as the sun at the right hand of the Saviour. And now is this hope present and lively in your hearts ; it is one of the tokens of a son of God ; so that it is quite vain to talk of any of our Christian privileges without it. Does the son of the great man, and heir of the great wealth of this world, ever forget the prospect which is before him ? No, truly ; the child of this world is wise in his generation. Shall the son of God, and heir of eternal glory, then, be insensible to his prospects ? He cannot be ; in the moment that he becomes so, he loses his rank altogether.

Where, then, is the earnest expectation ? where are the tokens of that “lively hope to which God hath begotten man again³ ?” What answer do the heart, the conscience, the life, give to this question ? When a man is hoping in earnest expectation for any thing, does he not show it in a thousand ways, so that it becomes the concern of his friends, the talk of his acquaintance ? The fulness of his heart overflows in every word and deed, and the entire management of his affairs is directed by it ; he plans according to it by day, he dreams according to it by night ; he turns every thing to its account ; no opportunity that has to do with it is slighted ; no token that promises success to it is disre-

³ 1 Pet. i. 3.

garded; no task that seems to forward it is refused. His expectation is indeed earnest. Do you ever see him interested in matters which have not to do with it? still more, do you ever see him do things contrary to it? Not so indeed; he has it too much at heart for that; and yet how many things are done daily, which are utterly contrary to what should be the earnest expectation of the Christian! how many things continually left undone which have every thing possible to do with it!

All undoubtedly hope to be saved. But do they distinctly hope it, earnestly expect it? Which of the two is it, the thing always uppermost in the heart, as the grand thing to be first made safe, as the end of all, or the thing thought of only when the heart is driven to it; put out of sight as long as any thing of the world can be kept in sight; made indeed so far the end, as to be always left to the end, and most unwillingly begun with even then? Now what does this passage tell us? does it not give us a very different view indeed of the matter from that which is commonly taken? does it represent the Christian as laying up his hopes in this world, and taking his ease in it? No. It says that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain until now." Such a world of sinful misery is this found to be by all who seriously consider it. It says that the Christian, burdened by the flesh, groans for a deliverance from the "bondage of

corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God, and waits for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of his body at the resurrection of the dead." It says that "we are saved by hope," that is, that our salvation is our continual hope. We do not see it, for then how could we hope? but we are looking out for it, and with patience waiting for it.

And now are we indeed living according to this rule? Alas! how generally is it contradicted by a life of forgetfulness of God, of minding earthly things, of indifference to spiritual things, of hurry and bustle about the things which are passing away, of delay and unwillingness about the things which are eternal; and yet in the midst of all this, ask any one if he hopes to be saved, and he will tell you of course that he does; but then, what can he mean? can he mean any thing more than this, that when he has done with this world, he hopes to begin afresh with another, not less agreeable?

Thus the child of this world is a veritable child indeed; all his care and concern is to have one plaything after another. And do you think that the Son of God came forth from the secret of his glory, and laid down his life on the cross, to furnish such a hope as this, to humour such a child as this, to save for heaven one who would not willingly be saved from this world, if he could help it, but would live in it, and forget God and Christ in it, as long as he

could? Is there any helping a man who hopes so faintly that he will not trouble himself to work out his hope, and endeavour to make it good? Yet such too commonly is the hope of salvation. The work is not taken in hand; the man trusts for its object turning up by good chance at the end; its day seems so far off that he is quite content to trust it to accidents; meanwhile he is diligent in working out all his earthly hopes; that work is not put off for a day, and never committed to accident. Alas! do we not continually see what careful provision men will make for securing any worldly advantage, and how little they will trouble themselves about any spiritual advantage?

What work, that is worthy of the name of work, can be done unless a man's heart be in it? and how is a man's heart in it but by hope? Hope sets it before his mind as already successfully finished; hope overcomes all hindrances; hope seizes all opportunities; hope loses no time; hope gives courage; hope gives patience; how then can the work of salvation be taken in hand without hope, that lively active hope which is here called earnest expectation? If salvation be indeed only coming off safe at last by good luck, after having taken no care to avoid the danger or to secure the deliverance, then indeed as there is little work to do, so there needs be but little hope to entertain; and a man may give himself little concern in one way or another;

he may leave it till much more important matters shall have been first provided for. But if, on the contrary, it be a deliverance from the burden of the flesh into the enjoyment of the weight of eternal glory; if it be a redemption from the prison-house of Satan, and translation to the house of the Father in heaven; if it be the assured possession of the rank of a son of God after a state of searching trial, and his manifestation in glory at the right hand of the Saviour on the great day of his coming, with heaven and earth for witnesses, then it must be undertaken with hope indeed, and the expectation of that hope must be earnest indeed; the heart must be full of it, the head must be clear in it, the hand must be diligent in it. The hope must be the first and last thing in his heart, the work must be the first thing and the last thing in his hand; he must be looking through all the days of this world to the last great day shining at the end of all their dark trouble and dim anguish of trial. He must be looking beyond all the vanities of this world, and through all the stages of spiritual improvement and godly progress, to the glory of the manifestation of the sons of God: as the child longs for manhood, and discovers with joy its several tokens as they come to him one after another, so the child of God longs for that perfect state of the perfect man, which the final adoption shall bring with it, and hails with delight its many earnest and

cheerful signs which are accruing to him in his present state ; so earnest is his expectation, and therefore so earnest will he be in his work. All is real with him ; for what can be more real than eternity ?

Who will be declared for sons of God at the manifestation of the last day, we know not ; God alone knows the heart of man, and judges the inner man. We see but the outer, and may be deceived ; but of these two things we may be quite certain : (1) That those in whom we can discern no signs of the working of this earnest expectation in the conduct of their lives, have, as yet at least, nothing to do with that manifestation. As they have no care about it, so they can have no share in it ; as they work not towards it, so they cannot be in the road for it. (2) And we may be assured of this also, that if we do feel in earnest in our expectation, seconding it by an anxious struggle to attain, then, like all earnest people, we are in the right way ; and we have this grand advantage over such as are earnest in the pursuit of mere worldly things, that we work not with the arm of the flesh, but with the arm of the help and power of God. However earnest a man of this world's work may be, he must sometimes be cast down by disappointment, he must often be ignorant of the right way of going to work, he must frequently not only want many things that he knows to be necessary, but must know that he

is ignorant of many things that he wants ; but if we be in earnest in our heavenly expectation and the work of our heavenly calling, we have no uncertainty whatever ; the Holy Spirit of God comes to our help, assures our fainting heart, enlightens our understanding to the knowledge of our wants, instructs our spirit in supplication to the throne of grace, so that we should ask for the right things and in the right manner. Thus the “ Spirit helpeth our infirmities,” as the Apostle says ; “ for we know not what we should pray for as we ought ; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered ; and He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”

Can we then really be at the work of our salvation, if the manifestation of the sons of God be not before our eyes in earnest expectation ? Can we understand at all, can we feel at all, what it is ? No one undertakes a serious work and is in the dark as to the object of his work ; on the contrary, the clearer it is in the light of his heart before him, so much the better he will understand how to do it. And can the manifestation of the sons of God be before our eyes, if we let earthly things engross our thoughts, if we be forgetful of God, the Father of those sons, if we go far from Him in the ways of disobedience, if we remain indifferent to his honour

and glory, if we will not afford time to praise Him, nor even heart to think upon his mercies ?

All other ends that men make to themselves are ends indeed ; when they have been accomplished, there is an end of them. But the manifestation of the sons of God, while it is the end of man's hopes in this body, is but the beginning of his blessedness in the body that shall be ; and the day of it, is but the day of accession to a reign of everlasting peace and immortal glory ; then He is publicly acknowledged and proclaimed as a son of God, yea, even as a king, with the proclamation of the last trump ; he is clad in robes of righteousness, crowned with a crown of life, shown in his glorious ensigns to admiring witnesses, men and angels, and then he is admitted into the city of God, to dwell with angels and the first-born that have been written in heaven, for evermore.

What a high calling indeed is this ! what a lively hope hath God in his abundant mercy set before us ! Shall we thank Him only with our lips, and not with our lives ? shall we forget the price of the blood of the Son of God, which purchased all this for us ? Is not God most just if his wrath shall dig the pit of shame and misery as deep for those that refuse his call, as He has exalted the throne of glory high for those that accept it, and make it sure ? What could God have done more for us, when what He has done surpasses all imagination of man ? and what can

we expect Him to do, if we will not make use of what He has done? Let not that day, that awful day, come upon us as a thief in the night, to rob us of our heavenly treasure, and destroy our everlasting life; let none abide in a state of sad, perilous unwatchfulness; but by watchfulness and prayer, by the confession and thanksgiving of holy and profitable living in the service of God, by perseverance in doing the will of God, let every one, under the grace of his Spirit, keep alive and actively working in his heart the expectation of the creature that waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

SERMON X.

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SONS OF GOD.

Fourth Sunday after Trinity.

ROM. viii. 21.

“ Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

By “ creature ” is here meant, man created anew to good works in Christ Jesus, renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him. And the very first exercise of the new and heavenly knowledge in him is to discover his real condition in this body of corruption, to find out that it is indeed a house of bondage, and to groan for deliverance ; and this is therefore the essential distinction between those that remain in the old man and his sinful deeds, and those who have put him off and put on the new. As a person living in a ruinous house becomes so used to it as to think little of its dangers ; as the man who has been born in slavery has no notion

of its misery and shame ; as the man who has had a disease of old standing comes to trouble himself little about it ; as the man born blind knows not the inconvenience of darkness ; even so also the man who abides in the old Adam, in all his disease and death of body, in all his uncleanness of soul and blindness of spirit, has no notion of any thing better, and therefore never tries after any thing better ; he is well contented with himself as he is.

Indeed, it is impossible for one who has once really been enlightened by the word of God, and tasted of the heavenly gift, and been made partaker of the Holy Ghost, ever again to be the same as he was before ; he must either be much better or much worse ; if he fall back into his former state, then it is one of awful desperation indeed, because now his eyes are open, and he sees all his nakedness and destitution, all the misery and degradation which formerly he saw not, and therefore he most probably becomes utterly reckless, and wallows in the mire of the sin to which he has returned. He now sees the wretchedness of the old prison-house, he now feels its corruption, is aware of its darkness, is sensible of its disgrace ; but then these considerations, instead of stirring him up, as they did before, now only harden his heart, scar his conscience, and confirm his desperation. But let us look into this miserable condition a little more nearly.

When man fell into sin, he brought upon himself two sets of evils; he brought on himself the corruption of the body, ending in death of the body, and he also brought upon himself the defilement of the soul, which utterly disqualified him for obedience to the will of God, and for standing at all in the presence of God; and of this state we must all feel more or less, as long as we shall dwell in the tabernacle of the flesh: the best of men must experience the pains and afflictions which are the lot of this mortal body, and he must feel still more sharply, and deplore still more deeply, the want of power which he feels within him of acting up to his knowledge, and doing the will of God to that perfection which he daily more clearly sees that God's law requires, but his own nature cannot afford. And is not this the very essence of slavery, to have the will but not to have the power? Is not this the very misery of bondage, to have arms and legs to walk and work within the strait confinement of the prison, but not to use them as he would at liberty? Yes, here lies the occasion of the groaning and travailing in pain which the man of God suffers. Pains of body are a trifle to the pangs of mind which afflict him. When he considers that with all his love he finds himself unable to fulfil obedience; with all his thankfulness to yield profitable service; with all his willing spirit he experiences flesh to be weak, irresolute, perverse, corrupt;

his very light discovers to him horrors that before lay hidden in darkness; his very obedience shows him the extent of his disobedience; how earnestly, indeed, does he desire deliverance! And he hath a deliverer: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, hath broken the chain of his captivity; He hath brought to him the glorious liberty of the children of God; not, indeed, that he will have this liberty perfect in this world, but he will have sure earnestness of it. Christ has made him free in such liberty as he can stand fast in; the Spirit of the Lord is with him, and where that Spirit is, there is liberty. He feels not, indeed, any sufficiency in himself, but he feels the sufficiency of Christ enabling him; he feels the freedom of a child of God, to whom he looks up as to a Father, and not Master only; and he has the assurance that the day is at hand when he will experience in all its fulness that liberty of which he already enjoys so many sweets, when he will be able to serve God with a whole and perfect heart, to worship Him in full truth and pure spirit, to know Him to all the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the work of his love; to such an end he looks forward, and waits patiently in hope—the adoption of the sons of God.

How can we estimate this glorious liberty without enjoying it? What notion has the slave of liberty? He cannot distinguish it from licen-

tiousness, nor can the carnal heart enjoy the liberty in Christ ; “ He uses it,” says St. Peter, “ for a cloak of maliciousness,” viz. as a cover to his selfishness, as a veil of hypocrisy under which to work his own will, and not God’s ; to pretend God’s service, and forward his own interest ; thus much reproach has been brought on the Gospel, and added to that which has come from the evil lives of unfaithful professors ; so difficult is it for the heart of man to understand the right use of so excellent a gift. But are there not many who will not make use of it at all in any way, not even in pretence ? are there not too many who are content to abide in the slavery of the old man ? There are, first of all, those who go by very contraries ; they take the bondage of the corruption of this world to be liberty, and the liberty of the Gospel to be restraint and slavery. And why ? Because the Gospel, in all its fulness of liberty, calls on them to serve God with true and faithful service, to bring under their body, to put a check on all carnal passion, to submit their will to God’s commandments. All this they think the very strictest of bondage, because they know not God, nor understand the Lord Jesus Christ ; they know not that the service of God alone gives its proper enlargement to the heart, its full room to the affections, its free expanse to the understanding ; it alone supplies love unstinted, faith unfettered by doubt, hope unconfined by earthly

objects; they cannot imagine, therefore, how the service of God can be the most perfect freedom; for the carnal heart thinks itself most free when it gives most rein to its ungodly passions; it does not understand how sin takes the man captive in body, soul, and spirit, and binds him in chains which he cannot loose.

But what so tyrannical as any habitual sin? how it binds the man down to its service, and will let him do nothing but what suits its purpose. What such a tyrant as the body let loose to its passions of the corrupt flesh? How it enthrals the affections and blinds the understanding! What a state of bondage is forgetfulness of God! The soul is kept down upon earth, tied to earthly and perishing things; it cannot rise to heaven, it cannot mount in the wide expanse of Divine meditation to the throne of God; in all its immortality it is bound to things of change and death: the offender may think himself free, because he has no restraint on his sinful inclinations; but those inclinations are hard task-masters, and it is true freedom to subdue and bind them: he thinks himself free, because he is walking in his own ways; but his own ways are narrow, crooked paths of sin, in which he cannot walk upright or straight: he thinks himself free, because he has rid himself of the obligation of keeping the Lord's Day, and attending on his worship; whereas he is depriving his body of a day of rest, his spirit of a day of

relaxation, and of a flight to heavenly regions of peace: he may think himself free, because he has silenced the reproaches of conscience, and now can do what he likes without any hindrance of scruples. But he has deprived himself of the advice of the wisest and truest friend, and given himself up, bound hand and foot, into the hands of his spiritual adversary, who, as all thieves are afraid of a light, begins his robbery of the house of man's heart by putting out the natural light of conscience; then he can do what he likes; he can rifle the house of all its spiritual treasure, and he can bind its owner in chains of darkness for ever: he thinks himself free, because he allows himself every indulgence; but this brings disease on the body with all its miserable confinement; and finally, the confinement of the grave, and debasement upon the soul, with all its subjection to the vile and gross elements of earth; in short, there is not a more miserable bondage, a more hopeless captivity, a stricter and more galling yoke, a more oppressive and festering fetter, than that very state which the natural man imagines to be the perfection of freedom.

A bondage of corruption it is indeed; it corrupts the body, and brings it to the grave of corruption; it defiles the spirit, and degrades it down to the pit of unclean spirits. Is it not wonderful, that man can take a delight and make a boast in such a state,

which were intolerable enough, even if the curse of Almighty God was not upon it; and this, too, when a deliverance has been provided from it, and not only from it, but into a state of surpassing blessedness, a state as exalted towards heaven, as that is debased towards hell, the state of the glorious liberty of the children of God, which is already prepared to receive regenerated man, with an abundant earnest of the glory which shall be revealed hereafter, which has been ordained to fit him for the full and free enjoyment of such blessedness as no heart can conceive? But how shall he possibly be admitted into it who will not qualify himself for it, by forsaking the bondage of corruption, and exercising himself continually in the habits and service which it requires? Even in this world a slave does not become fit for freedom, but by careful education and enlarged experience; but that slave is not to be compared for blindness, ignorance, and maliciousness, to the slave of sin; and that freedom is not to be compared for largeness of privileges and liberty of thought and deed with "the glorious liberty of the children of God." How, then, can he be qualified for a change so vast, so extreme, by the experience of the few days, and often of the few hours, which are given at the close of life to the preparation?

Would it not have been the height of folly and madness in St. Peter, if, when the angel of

the Lord visited him in prison, and the light shone in the prison, and the chains fell off from his hands, and gate flew open after gate, he had refused to go forth? Such an angel has Christ been to us in the spirit: He hath visited us with his glorious presence from heaven; the light of his Gospel has shined in unto us; the chains of the bondage of Satan have been loosed; door after door has been opened through long and dark passages of captivity, and the street of the city of God is now open to us. Shall we stop? shall we hesitate to go forth and attain such glorious liberty, and exchange the company of malefactors for the society of the children of God? May the grace of God defend us all from such inexcusable perverseness; may it ever stir us up to secure such glorious liberty!

SERMON XI.

THE SUDDENNESS OF SIN.

Sixth Sunday after Trinity.

2 SAM. xii. 7.

“ And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.”

IF we wanted a lesson to convince us of the exceeding deceitfulness of the heart of man, of the very great frailty of his nature, of the alarming progress of a sin when once cherished in the heart, of its sad consequences, and of the great depth of sincere repentance which God requires that the stains may be washed out through the blood of his only-begotten Son, surely we could not, in the whole range of the history of the human race, have turned to a more solemn and instructive portion of it, than that which forms the subject of the chapter which has this morning been read out from the Old Testament. With what weighty authority does it come to

us, when we think of the high dignity, spiritual and temporal, of David, the principal actor in it, who was at once a king and a prophet, who had been declared to be the man after God's own heart, who was a type of the Christ to come !

What a tremendous height was all this to fall from ; and how severe indeed was the hurt of that fall ; and how glorious the mercy of God in raising David up from it again ! The considerations which such an example should bring to our hearts, may be arranged under the heads, (1) Of David's sin ; (2) Of his punishment and repentance.

(1) The circumstances of David's sin were indeed most horrible ; and coming from such a man, the example is indeed most alarming to every one that reads and reflects upon them, most humiliating to every heart, and the more so, the more pure and upright it is. The first step of his sin is sufficiently heinous. He formed an adulterous intercourse with the wife of Uriah ; the next however exceeded even this : he treacherously procured the death of this Uriah, by ordering one of his captains to post him in the hottest part of the battle, and then leave him there ; thus he went on from adultery to murder. What shall we now think ? who shall not now tremble ? who will not now watch and pray, when he sees the miserable frailty of our nature thus exemplified ? In David we see a just and wise king, an inspired prophet, a man

who had served God from his youth up, and proved faithful under many severe trials, and done much good service in the Church of God in every way, were it only in the composition of the Psalms, which, down from his day, have ever formed a portion of its public worship. Yet from this great height he fell! Yes, and fell lower than any amongst us, it is to be hoped, will ever fall, as to the particular nature of his sin. Who then is safe, if he be off the watch? who, let him be as good, as just as man can be, shall think that he shall always stand by his own strength, when such a man could fall? Who, of our day, can pretend to one-half of his spiritual experience and knowledge? May we not therefore be equally foolish? How few can pretend to any thing like his holiness! how few then can be safe from his sins! Can one? The falling off of such a man is like the sound of the fall of a lofty and splendid church in the midst of a town, which is shaken through all its streets and terrified in all its hearts at the deafening noise. So awfully, so perfectly is the frailty of our nature exemplified to us in his sin: a stronger building than ours has fallen under the battery of Satan. Are we safe? Have we no need to tremble and look to ourselves, and see in what condition we are? Can we be off our watch and be in safety for a moment? can we be absent from God through neglect of prayer, and stand for a moment? O, how vain is our

own strength! how utterly must we put ourselves into the hands of the Lord with the watchful prayer of faith in Jesus Christ, crying, in David's own words, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower¹!"

How does the lesson deepen in fearfulness, when we consider how comparatively slight was the beginning from which these two enormous sins arose! It was a violation of the rules of propriety, the indulgence of a lustful curiosity, exceedingly blamable indeed in any one, and highly degrading to a man of so dignified a character as David; yet the deceitfulness of his heart, which indeed necessarily had much communication with the loose habits of the camp, and become too familiarized with their sight, represented this to him as pardonable, if not indifferent. This led the way to criminal passions in his heart, and these in their natural course to their accomplishment, and this in regular consequence dragged him down to the lowest depth of crime, even to murder.

So dreadfully regular is the advance of sin; so light, so easy to be subdued in its beginning, so grievous, so difficult to be resisted in the end. When one sin is once deliberately committed,

¹ Psalm xviii. 1, 2.

then another follows, either to carry on the gratification, as one lust of the flesh brings on the craving of another, or to prevent exposure; and thus it becomes the fruitful parent of many more, which, when the offender committed it, he never dreamed of, from the very thought of which he would have turned away in horror and disgust. How few, for example, are those murders which are committed out of pure enmity, compared with the number of those which are committed for the sake of carrying on or concealing some other sin. Can we then be too watchful as to what thoughts we admit into our hearts? An evil thought taken in there, may be like the letting in of water from an immense pool by a little lifting up of the sluice; with all our power we cannot shut it down again, and in rushes the water, irresistible and utterly destructive. So it was with David; and may it not be much more so with any one of us? and yet men can talk of light sins, trifling offences; no sin can be light, no offence can be trifling, which is deliberately committed, for then it must lead to something much worse; the offender has then cast off, for the time at least, the fear of God, and the love of Christ, and he has taken into his heart the love of himself, the indulgence of his sinful passions; how then can he not fall deeper still? He has foregone the protection of the Lord God Almighty: he has put himself into the hands of Satan; how then can any sin,

however little the world may reckon of it, be trifling? what more trifling in appearance than the oozing out of the few drops of water which precede the bursting of the sluice? what more trifling than the little faint spark which runs along the train of gunpowder, and levels cities with the ground? what more trifling than the first step set upon the wrong road? yet persevered in, how far asunder does it carry us from the proposed end of our journey! O no; we cannot calculate the consequences of the least turning aside from the straight path of righteousness; we are then all of a sudden out of the way of God's help and protection; we are then all at once in the wilderness, with none but the tempter for our companion; we then know not whither we may be led in the next moment, though we ought to know, if at such a time we would but consider, that we are sure of going further into sin, and nigher unto perdition. Where was David before he fell away from righteousness? He was, as the chapter before this tells us, at Jerusalem, staying there no doubt for the sake of his kingly duties, while his captains were leading his armies against the Ammonites; he had been reposing from the heat of the day, and at eventide had risen again for his usual solemn and high duties. But where, in the course of a few verses, do we find him? Wallowing, alas! in the mire of lust, and plotting the murder of the bravest of his captains.

Who now can abide in unwatchful security? who now shall not take heed to his ways? When a man shall walk heedlessly over ground infested with vipers, and not be bitten; when he shall run blindfold along rocks, and not fall; when he shall let his ship drift with the tide as it will, and not be wrecked; when he shall let a spark of fire have its own way on a windy night, and not have his house burnt, then he may be off his watch against the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and not sin.

See too in this example of David, how sin benumbs the conscience, and so also indisposes a man to guard against further sin. This chapter opens with the message of Nathan, the prophet of the Lord, to David; and he tells to David, who was sitting in his office of king of his people, and supreme minister of the law of God, the case of a rich man having seized, and dressed for the table, the favourite lamb of a poor man. This tale, which is told so affectingly, only told in other words David's own injustice towards Uriah; and now behold the stupifying, the deadening effects of deliberate sin! This most wise man, wise in the knowledge of God and in the experience of his heart beyond most men that have lived, had become so dull of understanding, that he did not perceive that he himself was personally concerned in the crime of the rich man. How was his conscience darkened, how was his heart waxed gross, when he who once

so severely reprov'd himself for the venial offence of having privily cut off the skirt of Saul's robe while he slept, who rejected with loathing the advice of his comrades, who wished him to seize the favourable opportunity of putting to death the man who was seeking his life; when such a man as he had been could remain insensible to such grievous sins as adultery and murder, even when he was upbraided with them under so thin a disguise as the parable which Nathan here relates.

So much for a quiet conscience under sin; it is a conscience whose light is quenched, and therefore awakes not the sinner; it is a conscience whose life is dead, and therefore it is quiet. How different from the quiet conscience of innocence, which is quiet because all the thoughts of the heart have been laid open before God, and confessed to Him in the name of Jesus Christ the only mediator, on whose merits it leans for acceptance in all confidence of hope, having the earnest of his gracious promise of everlasting life in the fruits of his Spirit of holiness.

Yet see how a conscience quite dead to its own sins, can be quite alive to those of a neighbour's. The justice of David, which was blind to his own delinquency, was exceedingly sharp-sighted to that of the rich man. He shall not only, says David, restore fourfold according to the law, but also even beyond the law—be put

to death. Then it was, in the midst of such forgetfulness of his real situation, such self-righteous indignation at the sins of others, that Nathan struck him dumb with the words, "Thou art the man," and upbraided him with his forgetfulness of God's peculiar mercies towards him, and announced to him all those calamities which were to come upon him for the punishment of his offence. Then it was indeed, but not till then, that his conscience awoke from its deadly slumber, smote him with the arm of a giant refreshed from sleep; and he said unto Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Thus at length his eyes were open, and his sin stared him in the face in all its loathsome hideousness; he had now no more leisure to judge of the sins of a neighbour; he was once more on a return to God, and like every one that puts himself in the presence of God, had enough to do at home with his own heart.

Thus we have considered this passage under the head of the *sin* of David. There still remains the second head, that of his repentance. But the time does not allow me to enter upon this at the length which it properly requires: I shall therefore take it for the subject of another discourse. Only let me now remind you of the exceeding frailty of our corrupt nature, and how we must flee to our Saviour's arms for protection, and commit ourselves entirely unto Him, look to his merits for forgiveness, and to

his Spirit for the means of righteousness ; and this we can do but by watchfulness and prayer. We have seen how far, how miserably far, from righteousness even they may fall who have received, yea, and even put to account, the most excellent gifts of God ; how sudden as well as deep that fall may be ; how slight the first temptation may be ; how, if not resisted at first, it may overthrow the strongest of men : a stronger castle than ours has been taken ; how then shall we stand if we be not on the watch ? May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ set us and stablish us on that foundation which never can be shaken, even the rock of his salvation.

SERMON XII.

ON REPENTANCE.

(*Sixth Sunday after Trinity.*)

2 SAM. xii. 13.

“ And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin ; thou shalt not die.”

IT is easy, alas! to imitate David in his sin; and the thought of this, no doubt, added to the pangs of his repentance. His wise heart, now restored to all its former light, could not but foresee that if the example of his sin should operate as an useful warning to the children of God to the end of the world, so also it should be a stumbling-block to the indifferent, and confirm them in their carelessness, while it moved the mockery of the unbeliever. He, doubtless, well understood how many would encourage themselves from his sin, and instead of taking warning, would argue that if a man so distinguished for piety and wisdom could fall away so disgrace-

fully, transgress so deeply and notoriously, they may surely be excused for the comparatively venial sins which they commit, which are trifles by the side of adultery and murder, and that great strictness of conduct of life cannot be required from any one, since David so readily obtained pardon for such iniquities.

But all that so congratulate themselves will find how wrong and hasty their conclusion has been, when they come to consider David's repentance; let them imitate him there if they can: surely as foul as is the example of his transgression, so beautiful is the model of his repentance. From the moment that the words of the prophet of the Lord had removed the film of self-delusion from his eyes, and he thus saw himself really and distinctly as he was, a detestable offender against God and man, from this moment we see this man of God reasserting his former character, again appearing the same with that David who had spared the life of his most bitter enemy, and not with him who had plotted the murder of a faithful servant: his repentance was indeed deep, sincere, and lasting. Let us now consider some of its points.

(1) First of all, as the sin had been public, done to the open scandal of the Church of God to the end of the world, so was his repentance; his penitent confession is recorded to the end of time, to be read by every child of God, and be made the vehicle of hearty confession by every

penitent sinner until the day of judgment. It is contained in the 51st Psalm, which who can read without a fellow-feeling with his deep sorrow? How earnest are his expressions of contrition! how deep is the affliction of his heart! how complete is the sacrifice of the broken spirit and contrite heart! How does he expand into all its awful particulars the sense of those words with which his repentance first burst forth from his lips, "I have sinned against the Lord!" Hear some of his expressions: "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. . . . Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. . . . Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me. . . . Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. . . . Restore to me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit." Here we may remark the following characters:—

(2) Observe, that while he dwells upon his sin, he puts utterly out of the account all his former faithful service; there is not so much as a hint of it; and if a person did not know how David had hitherto walked before the Lord, and been his faithful minister on many trying occasions in the Church of God, he could not have guessed it from any expression here. Is there any hint, for example, of his having delivered the ark of God's covenant from the hands of the infidel enemy, and set it up in the tabernacle on

Mount Sion, with a public and splendid procession of praise and thanksgiving? No such thing. All notion of merit is excluded from genuine repentance; it feels that one sin has utterly cancelled all former innocence, however long it may have lasted, however bright it might have been; it feels that all which was good in the heart was the good gift of God, and that which was bad in the heart came from neglect or abuse of that gift, and is therefore inexcusable. To plead therefore any former merit before God, even supposing it merit, is but to show unthankfulness. No; the truly contrite heart gives glory to God for all the good, and takes shame to itself for all the evil. Here is one of the difficult things in true repentance; how unwilling is the heart to lose sight of any thing which it can set against its sin! Even when it sees the vanity and sinfulness of doing this, it still clings to a lurking comfort in the thought of some merit; it is unwilling to forego every support of self-righteousness, to place itself at the bar of God's judgment, and to be found speechless without one word of defence; yet so David did. And who shall compare his service to God's cause with that of David? Verily, before our sins can be blotted out from the remembrance of God, our deeds of righteousness, as we think them, must be blotted out from the remembrance of our own hearts. We must say in the words and sense of David, "Against thee, thee only, have

I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight : that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest¹.”

(3) And seeing his repentance in his own words, let us follow it up in his own actions. See the utter resignation with which he submits to the first instalment of his punishment in the death of the child ; see, again, how humbly he bears the curse of Shimei, when he cries out, “Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial ;” thus cruelly reminding him of the very sins which we have been considering. What is his answer to those who advised him to take vengeance on the curser ? “So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. . . . Let him alone, and let him curse : for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look upon my affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.” How utterly dead was the spirit of self-justification in the heart of the man who could speak and act thus !

(4) And hence we see, that repentance in its true nature is not the work of a certain number of days or years ; it lasts through life : as David says, “My sin is ever before me ;” and as David showed by his humbleness of heart to the end of his life. How different indeed is his conduct from that of such professedly-reformed profligate

¹ Psalm li. 4.

gates as proclaim that they have repented, and yet are full to overflowing with all the pride of self-righteousness, and remember the blackness of their former sins only for a boast of their present whiteness! It is easy, indeed, most easy, for them and all to have sinned with David; but it is difficult, indeed, most difficult, for all to repent with him. So completely did David make good those words of confession, "I have sinned against the Lord."

(5) And now, having gone through the darkness of his repentance, we come to the light of his forgiveness. God, who seeth the heart of man, saw the real worth of those words, "I have sinned against the Lord:" He saw in them the deeds which followed them; He knew that they were not showy blossoms, that would soon drop off, without any setting of fruit, like flowers in an unsuitable climate; He saw in them the earnest of much and good fruit, as in a tree that is in its proper soil and genuine climate. The beginning and the end are at once in the sight of God, and He knew that the words came from a heart which would make them good by the help of his grace; and therefore He accepted David's repentance, and commissioned the prophet Nathan to say unto him, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." By this proclamation, David was reinstated into the favour of his offended God, which he had so grievously forfeited; nor did he ever fall away

again, and belie the sincerity of his repentance. So, if his sin stand out from the pages of Scripture as a beacon to warn us from shipwreck of the faith, his pardon also is a living monument to the end of time of the unfailing mercy of God upon the sincere penitent, showing us how the blood of Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth from all sin. But then the repentance must be sincere, it must be the work of faith in Christ; it must not be, as in many it may be, only a sorrow arising out of the worldly loss which the sin has brought with it; it must be the sense of sorrow for having offended God, the mourning for his absence, the deploring the estrangement from Him and loss of his presence, the feeling of the wretched change of situation from a child of God to a child of wrath, from an user of inestimable privileges to an abuser of them, from a thankful diligent servant to an unthankful faithless steward. Would that men would thus consider the real nature of repentance, and not suppose it to be the quick and easy work which they generally imagine, and so leave it as a fit occupation for their declining years, or for a sick bed, and even for a death-bed. Has it not plainly appeared, that a sincere and efficacious repentance, like David's, requires all the un-eneebled powers of body and mind to support it? and that if we would derive sure, unmistaken comfort and encouragement from it, we should begin it in good time, that it may assure us by

the evidence of fruit? Sin would not be run into with such carelessness, if men had at the moment before their eyes the bitterness and agony of sincere repentance, such as David's example exhibits to us.

The prophet adds, "Thou shalt not die!" The Lord, he means to say, had so far put away the penalty of sin in his forgiveness of it, that David should not immediately receive its wages of death, but that he should still live, and have an opportunity of working out his salvation. But though God gave him his forfeited life back again, He did not give him the worldly blessings of his life back again; on the contrary, the life now prolonged to him was one long payment of penalty. The public example which David had given of sin, required as public an example of God's judgment upon it; and we have only to open the next chapter, and we open at the same moment the melancholy narrative of the continued misfortunes which darkened the remaining days of David. There we meet with the first division in his house made by the sins of his favourite son Absalom: all the words of Nathan came to pass indeed. The Lord did raise up evil against him out of his own house. All his prayers, all his tears could not have prevailed against this execution of his sentence; but he did not pray against it; he acknowledged its justice; he submitted to it with resignation, thankful that in his gracious mercy God had

“delivered him (as he had once done Job, though on a different account) unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord².” So he drank of the cup of affliction to the very dregs; he was mocked at, cursed, upbraided with his crimes, rebelled against, not only by his enemies, but by his friends; yes, even by his own children. The sword came upon his house, and, as God threatened, never left it. Incest, rebellion, murder, reigned in it; and, to finish all, a plague ate up his people, and consumed the strength and glory of his kingdom before his sight: so terribly did this man of God repay the sins of a few days with a life of sorrow!

So does the example of David preach to us from his sin and from his repentance. Can we study it too diligently, or take it to heart too closely? From it we learn the alarming peril of ever so short a state of unwatchfulness in the most spiritually-minded and most highly-gifted of men: what then shall become of the weaker? From it we learn the real nature of repentance, what an earnest work it is, how it tasks head and heart for its proper accomplishment: shall we go leisurely about it? In it we learn, that though God be merciful, and will abundantly pardon, yet He is inexorably just, and requires a deep and lasting repentance; and however He

² 1 Cor. v. 5.

may remit the punishment in the world to come, will assuredly inflict it with exemplary severity in this. With such instruction in our hearts, let us seek God in earnest prayer to deliver us from temptation, to send us continually the grace of his Holy Spirit to renew our hearts, and turn them unto Him in all faith and love, so that we may be faithful servants and followers to our life's end, of his blessed Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

SERMON XIII.

THE ENQUIRY INTO SIN.

Seventh Sunday after Trinity.

2 SAM. xxi. 1.

“Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year. And David enquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.”

WHY should this chapter have been chosen for this morning's lesson? is it only to show the unforgiving temper of the Gibeonites? There would be little profit in that. No. It comes with good reason in order next after that which you heard last Sunday: there was exhibited to us God's denouncement of judgment upon sin in the case of David. He there told David that the consequences of his sin should not stay with himself, but that they should go on in grievous calamities to his family. “Now therefore the sword shall not depart from thine house,” God

said to him. Here then we have an example of such dealings of God with sinners ; we see the sin of one man, Saul, coming upon his family, according to that rule which God hath specially laid down among the strictest of his commandments. “ I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.” That God governs the world upon this rule is plain from our experience ; we see daily some example of it : families as innocent of the offence of their father or forefather as the sons of Saul were, are beheld manifestly suffering for it, whether in their health, in their fortune, in their character, or in any other way ; indeed, are we not all now suffering as children of Adam for his sin ? So old and established is the rule, so notorious and universal is the example.

The first thing to be learned from such a manifestation of the ways of God’s dealing with sin, is the very dreadful extent to which it goes : nearly 200 generations have past since the days of Adam, and yet the effects of his sin have not run out their course. Generations to come will bear in turn their burden, until the judgment of the last day shall at length put an end to its dreadful bondage. All this world is of a piece ; one part is joined on to another, so that no man, however selfish, can do any thing for himself only ; some one else must in some way or

another come in for his share in it. Can the Christian then take too great heed to himself? can he walk too circumspectly? can he be too watchful against sin? How easy it is for him to commit it! how impossible for him to undo it! how hateful must it be in the sight of Almighty God, when He demands satisfaction for it, not only from the sinner himself, but from his children after him! What a disturbance does it make in the course of his gracious mercy, when it brings evil, not only on the offender, but on generations after him! One of the most common ways of communicating the evil effects of sin, is bad example; it goes on from father to son, corrupting generation after generation, keeping alive the fire of God's wrath upon children after children. Oh, who can tell what incurable mischief, both in this world and for the next, a man is doing who shows it? He may indeed repent, but can he communicate his repentance together with his sin? and if he could, would men follow it as readily as his sin? It is indeed no little part of the sorrow of his repentance, that he cannot do this; but he must see his sin running its destructive course without being able to stop it for one moment.

The sin of Saul, we see, brought a judgment on the whole land; and it is most instructive to observe not only how widely mischievous it was in bringing down such a judgment, but also how it had been so completely forgotten by men, so

that David was obliged to enquire the reason of the judgment. So little do men think of sin until they begin to smart for it. Is not this also a matter of daily experience? They think not of sin how it offends God, but only how it affects themselves, so that if God did not put them in mind by punishing for it, one sin would be committed and forgotten after another, to the end of life. He however visits them with his plagues, and thus compels them to enquire, as David did, into the reason of their sufferings; He makes them think of Him and of his judgments in spite of their unwillingness. Alas! alas! how many never think of their sin before they are laid on the bed of sickness to which it has brought them! They go on, never thinking of God's eye being upon them all the while, never caring for the breaking of his special commandments, and abusing his gifts and his patience, and making waste and destruction among his works of love. They go on never troubling themselves to consider by what a public example God hath condemned sin; what a tremendous penalty He has demanded for it, in the cross and passion of his only-begotten Son; what an awful and irreversible sentence He will pronounce upon it when its course shall have ended with the end of the world; what a deep and dark prison-house is already prepared to receive it! They go on caring only for themselves, seeking their own pleasure, becoming stumbling-blocks to their

neighbourhood, bringing dimness on the glory of God amongst men by their evil works, disgracing their Christian character, abusing their Christian privileges; and then the allotted time of God's patience and long-suffering is run out. He smites them in the midst of their forgetfulness of Him; He lets them know that there is a God that judgeth the earth; they are laid low on the bed of affliction or disease; they see that this world has no more enjoyment for them, and that the world to come has plenty of pain in store for them, unless the Lord be merciful, and raise them up and forgive them. Then they are fain to enquire; and then they get their answer, "It is for thee, and for thy sinful forgetfulness of me." Then they are brought to remember the Lord, for awhile at least; but how often, as soon as the affliction is gone, their memory is gone, and the Lord is forgotten again. Both the justice of his arm that laid them low, and the mercy of his arm that raised them up again, are put equally out of remembrance.

But the true Christian, the child of God, and joint-heir with Jesus Christ, has no need of being compelled to enquire of God. He does enquire daily; daily there is presented to his eyes the miserable spectacle of this world, full of sorrow and death, and daily and hourly he feels in his body the tokens of mortality; daily he enquires of God in the meditations of his

heart, "Why is this?" and becomes more and more earnest in his enquiry; and daily God gives him an answer with greater clearness, "It is for sin." And daily also he sees his Saviour on the cross, in his agony and sufferings; and daily he enquires of the Lord in his heart, "Why is this?" and daily the answer comes to him with a deeper experience of his own need and God's abundance, "It is for sin." Thus he is in continual communion with the Lord; all that befalls him sends him to the Lord with earnest enquiry; and he is satisfied with the answer of the Lord, "It is for sin." Sin therefore is his abhorrence; he sees God's judgment ever upon it, he hears God's sentence continually going forth against it; and as he learns daily more and more to love with God and hate with God, he daily more and more loves holiness, and hates sin.

We see from this chapter, that after David had enquired of the Lord, and found the reason of the judgment which was upon the land, he immediately set to work to remove it. It could have been no pleasure to him, on the contrary, it must have been an occasion to him of exceeding painfulness of feeling and sorrow of heart, to give up for certain death the innocent children of the king, his late master; nevertheless, at God's answer he did it. But how few will follow the example of David in their own case! When God has visited them for their sins, and

when they have been forced to confess their sins, God having spoken to their enquiring conscience in a manner not to be mistaken, how slow are they to give up the darling sin to be crucified! they cannot bear to part with it; it is indeed a child of their old king and master whom they have hitherto been serving, it is one of the bloody house of Satan. They feel such affection for it, that they cannot bear to part with it; therefore instead of instantly surrendering it into God's hands, which are crying for justice upon it, to deal with it according to his eternal law, they feign excuses and make delays day after day, until they come quite to forget the answer which God had made to their enquiry. Nothing is so painful to the corrupt heart of man as to part with one of its sinful fondlings; though he knows that it is his sure destruction, he will cling to it to the last. Alas! how few are they who abandon sin from the true sense of its being sin, and therefore from the love of God, compared with those who give it up only when they can no longer indulge in it, either from want of health or want of means, when either they are too weak to go towards it, or too poor to bring it towards them. Then indeed, when they cannot help it, they will make a great merit of having no more to do with it; then they will think that they have abundantly satisfied God's justice, and have resolutely, of their own will, delivered the delin-

quent into his hands; they will not remember that the real fact is, that the delinquent has run away from them, and they can no longer have the pleasure of his company. And this is the delusion which so continually besets the bed of sickness and of death; the man is then removed out of the way, not only of the temptation, but even of the means of committing his old and favourite sins. Then the glutton, having lost his appetite, takes credit to himself for abstinence. Then the drunkard, unable to bear strong drink, takes credit to himself for temperance. Then the thief, unable to stir, takes credit to himself for honesty. Then the unchaste takes credit to himself for chastity; the frequenter of bad company for being alone or in good company; the railer and reviler for being quiet and fair-spoken.

Such never can have made serious and earnest enquiry of the Lord. Let all enquire with David's sincerity, and then they will perform with David's faithfulness. But men are loath at the very outset to enquire of the Lord; when the day of God's visitation on their sins is come, the first thing that they turn to is, to think who of their friends is in fault, if it can possibly be laid to the charge of another; and even when it can not, they are so unwilling to lose sight of their dear friends, that they must admit them to a share of the blame, and say, if such a friend had said that thing, and if such another friend had done

that other thing, all this could never have happened ; and it is not until they have ransacked every quarter where blame can possibly be laid, and found no room for it, that at last they are compelled to come to themselves, and bear their own burden. What wonder if so shuffling an enquiry should end in as shuffling an obedience to the answer of the Lord !

But the business of the Christian is to enquire with all sincerity, and with daily diligence ; for, if he be not less watchful than becomes his profession, he must see both within him and without him continual occasion for such enquiry. Does he see the hand of God's bounty always equally abundant ? Is there not sometimes a visitation of famine even within his heart ? It pleases God to stint him at once in some precious gift, to narrow his means of grace, to dim his usual light of spiritual joy, to vex with doubts his usual assurance of faith, and so to make him cry in the words of the Psalm, " Why art thou cast down, O my soul ? and why art thou disquieted within me ¹ ? " Thus God draws his children to enquire of Him ; and then He reveals to them the secret of something going wrong within them, which they would not otherwise have discovered, but having thus by his merciful grace discovered, they are most eager to surrender it to the demand of his offended

¹ Psalm xlii. 5.

justice. And thus they daily grow in the knowledge of themselves, and in the resignation of their wills unto God; thus they become more conformed to the image of the Son of God, who Himself, when in the flesh, though He were a Son, yet “learned obedience by the things which He suffered².” Thus as persons find pearls of inestimable price by diving to the bottom of the sea, and groping there amid fear and darkness, so they, searching into the dark depths of their heart with godly fear, bring always up to sight the precious pearl of their redemption in Jesus Christ. Such is the lesson which we may gather for our edification from this chapter, unpromising though it might have appeared. God for Christ’s sake give us grace to remember it.

² Heb. v. 8.

SERMON XIV.

THE PENALTY OF DISOBEDIENCE.

(Eighth Sunday after Trinity.)

1 KINGS xiii. 9.

“ For so it was charged me by the word of the Lord, saying,
Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same
way that thou camest.”

It may seem, at first sight, that the prophet was hardly visited for breaking such a commandment as this; and yet we may remember that Adam brought death on himself and us all by an act of disobedience much akin to this; for he was commanded not to eat, but he did eat: why should any of his children fare better, especially when sinning like this prophet, to whom the word of God came not as to other men, who see it written by the hand of man, or hear it read by the voice of man, but immediately into his heart from the Holy Spirit of God? He grieved the Holy Spirit, and he did despite to the Holy Spirit, and he quenched the Holy Spirit. Let

us first of all consider his example, and then apply it to ourselves.

God sent him upon a solemn mission against the idolatry of Israel, which had set up its altar at Bethel, and commissioned him with such heavenly powers, that he was enabled to restore Jeroboam's hand, and with such instructions as should maintain his high character of a prophet of the Most High, sent to denounce the corruption of the people. He was not, therefore, to keep their company, to eat bread or drink water with them; for with what face could he rebuke them, if he had entered their houses, and sat down at meat with them, and thus consented to them and their ways? So he kept strictly this commandment of God, until he was deceived into disobedience by a fellow-prophet, who pretended to have a message from God to invite him to his house. But though he did not sin wilfully, but was most artfully tempted into his sin, God's justice could not spare him; an example must needs be made of the punishment of faithlessness in so high a commission; and the prophet had surely grievously erred in believing a man who pretended to have the word of God, rather than God Himself, whose word he had from Himself in the secret of his own heart; therefore God solemnly condemned him to death through the mouth of that prophet whom he had suffered to tempt him, and sent the lion to execute his sentence.

Such is the example : now how does it concern the Christian ?

(1) The Christian is a prophet, for he has the gift of the word of God and of his Holy Spirit, and the revelation of the world to come. And his profession is to protest and struggle against the corruption of the world, against which he must denounce the wrath of God which cometh on the children of disobedience. If the prophet of whom we have been speaking prophesied concerning Josiah, the son of David, that he would destroy both the altars of idolatry and its priests, much more has the Christian to prophesy concerning Jesus Christ, the son of David, that He will come in judgment upon all unrighteousness, and destroy all the worshippers of the powers of the darkness of this world in the midst of their iniquities ; he has to proclaim a day appointed for the appearance of all men, quick and dead, at the judgment-seat of Christ, to “ receive the things done in the body, according to that they have done, whether it be good or bad ;” and he has received a charge from Almighty God to keep himself pure and “ unspotted from the world¹ ;” he must order his conversation as becometh the Gospel of Christ, and so much the rather, because he has not only to denounce sin wherever it may be found, but to show the power of Christ against it in himself, in his own life to

¹ James i. 27.

prove that Christ hath destroyed the work of the devil ; by the words and deeds which come from his heart, to proclaim that Christ hath overturned all the altars of iniquity there, and put the daily sacrifice of the broken and contrite spirit in its place.

(2) As, then, the prophet had the commandment given him, "to eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that he came," that is, to have no fellowship with the sinners whose idolatry God had sent him to denounce, so the Christian has a special injunction on this head ; it has been given him both in the word of his Saviour, and in the example of his Saviour. But did not that Saviour eat and drink with sinners ? Yes ; but they were sinners who were fleeing from their sins. And what better company than this ? What are the best of men, after all, but sinners fleeing from their sins ? "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God ;" and the grand distinction between the men of this world and the men of the world to come is, that the one still abides in his sinful state, still consents to the iniquity of the natural man, still clings to the world, the flesh, and the devil, while the other has renounced all these, and accepted Christ in his heart to the forgiveness of his sins, and the sanctification of his spirit. He, therefore, will not eat and drink with, that is, live together with, keep intimate company with, those who live the life of the

corrupt world, and let their desires loose to its covetousness, that is, its greediness of its seeming good things, which St. Paul expressly calls idolatry, because it estranges the heart from God, and makes a god of this world in his place.

We must not as Christians eat and drink by the way; we must not waste our precious time and heavenly substance in the carnal enjoyments of this life, of which indulgence in eating and drinking is the most gross, and therefore put to stand for the whole; but we must go on the way which God hath pointed out to us, without turning to the right or to the left for refreshment, for if we do, then we are out of his way, then we are in the forbidden habitations of sin; still less must we return by the same way that we came. Can the Christian go backward? Is not his course ever forward from knowledge to knowledge, from grace to grace, from experience to experience, from likeness of Christ to greater likeness, from victory over sin to more decisive victory, from faith in Christ to more stedfast faith, from love of God to more fervent love, from hope of the resurrection unto eternal life to brighter hope? So, if going forward be a slow and painful climb, what can going backward be but a sudden and destructive fall? St. Paul has especially set before us the counterpart to that charge laid on the prophet, that he should not turn again by the way that he came, in such

admonitions as these: "That we should forget the things which are behind, and reach forth unto the things which are before²:" "That we must run, not as uncertainly³:" and our Lord has summed up all in one lively figure, where He tells us, that "no man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God⁴."

(3) The prophet was tempted by a false brother; and even so are Christians tempted by false brethren, and persuaded by them to sit down to the meat and drink of sinful indulgence, and to return by the same way that they came, going backward, though at a much quicker rate, through the same steps that they have come forward in the Christian race. They go backward, for instance, from warm love of Christ to lukewarm, and thence to cold, from full light of knowledge of God to twilight, and so to darkness. And how do these false brethren argue? Even as that false brother of the prophet did, who pretended the word of God for the evil counsel which he gave: so these pretend to have the word of God, saying, that God cannot be so strict as to require this, and demand that; and they will even argue out of Scripture itself, wresting it to their own destruction, saying, that God is merciful; that He has created all things for our use, that therefore He would have

² Phil. iii. 13.

³ 1 Cor. ix. 26.

⁴ Luke ix. 62.

us enjoy ourselves and not deny ourselves, use his gifts freely, and not turn aside from them; and therefore what harm, they will go on to say, can there be in a little of this, and a little of that, now and then? Thus they lie unto their brethren, and tempt them to disobey the express word of God in their conscience. Is not the world full of these deceivers, who argue for sin with man against the natural light of their conscience, against the Divine light of the knowledge of God's word? It is so; and therefore the Christian must be continually on the watch against false prophets, that say unto him smooth things, and must beware of wolves, which come unto him in sheep's clothing. Why did the prophet allow himself to be persuaded to believe as a message from God, through another, that which was the very contrary of that which God had delivered immediately to himself, and all without question, all without examination? Because he found it the more agreeable of the two. God's word directed to himself forbade him to eat and drink; God's word, as pretended to him from the mouth of deceitful man, told him to eat and drink; so he chose to eat and drink, and he died for it!

(4) And whom did God choose to pronounce sentence of death upon him? His very deceiver. And is not this continually the case? Is not the tempter into sin often the very first to reproach the tempted with his sin, and to mock

at him when it is beyond remedy? Is he not often the first to open his eyes to his real state, and laugh at him? This is the way of Satan, the grand tempter of all, and therefore the way of his children also. Thus sin is felt by the tempted as the sting of death indeed! What must it be when condemned out of the mouth of sinners? And how is the voice of God now altered to them, which formerly communed with them through their own hearts, but now through the lips of sinners? How changed must He be, how estranged, how far away from them, what sinners must He reckon them, with whom He will have nothing to do but through sinners!

(5) And now see the end: a lion met the prophet in his way and slew him. And is there no lion ready for the faithless Christian too? Have we not all been plainly admonished of the roaring lion that walketh about, seeking whom he may devour? Yes; the lion is at the door ready for all the unwary, gaping upon them with his mouth, staring upon them with his eyes, on the crouch, and ready to spring at the first favourable moment, and rend and tear the soul in pieces. "Save me from the lion's mouth," should be our continual prayer, and watching against him should be the practice of our prayer. No doubt, when the lion came upon the poor prophet, he called out loudly to God for deliverance, and heartily repented that he had so easily taken the word of man for the word of

God. But there was none to deliver him ; he saw no other creature but the lion before him, and heard no other voice in answer to his cry, but the roar of the lion, and the sound of his own miserable voice amid the dead stillness of the wilderness. So there will come a time to the impenitent Christian, when instead of hearing the prayer of his distress, God will, as He says, " laugh at his calamity, and mock when his fear cometh." He will leave him to that lion, even Satan, who is appointed to devour the wicked, that they be seen no more amid the children of God. And surely the lion that met that prophet was nothing compared with him ; that lion could but destroy the body, but he can destroy both body and soul in hell !

(6) So have we been warned by the true prophet, by the false prophet, and by the lion ; so have we been admonished of our high state of heavenly knowledge, and the jealous and watchful keeping of the consistency of our Christian profession ; so we have been warned against the false brethren and tempters which abound in this world ; so we have been threatened with destruction if met in the way of disobedience. One thing more let us gather from all this lesson. Let us consider that if God could visit with such strict justice the disobedience of a man who was tempted to believe that he was obeying God, how will He visit those who yield to temptation with the clear

132 THE PENALTY OF DISOBEDIENCE.

knowledge that they are disobeying God, and hearken to men who they know cannot be prophets of God, as was the man to whom this prophet listened, but are evidently prophets of Satan? The warning, therefore, comes now to every one among us with double force. May Almighty God, for the sake of Jesus Christ, give also to every one grace, through his Holy Spirit, to profit by it.

SERMON XV.

CHRIST THE ROCK.

(Ninth Sunday after Trinity.)

1 COR. x. 4.

“ For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them :
and that Rock was Christ.”

THE Corinthians had been guilty of sad inconsistency of profession ; baptized though they had been in the name of the true and living God into Jesus Christ, they made no scruple of attending the feasts of the heathen which followed, and were made out of their sacrifices to their false gods, and even of going fresh from such abominations, with the meat and drink offered to devils in their mouths, to partake of the spiritual meat and drink which God had provided for them in the Lord's Supper, and which were a memorial of the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ offered to the true God upon the cross. Of course all such were (to say no more) in great

danger, and many did not escape the danger, of the carnal uncleanness which commonly took place on such occasions. St. Paul therefore here threatens them with the punishment which befel the Israelites in the wilderness for a like fault. They had been baptized into Moses; they had been fed with spiritual meat and drink, and by Christ who led them while in his state of heavenly glory in which He dwelt with the Father before He came in the flesh. But they sat down to eat and drink of the sacrifices of the heathen, and were led into the rest of the abominations which accompanied such feasts. And what did God do with them? Three-and-twenty thousand He destroyed at one blow, and of all the immense number which came out of Egypt, about two millions and a half, He suffered only two, Joshua and Caleb, to enter the promised land: the rest were overthrown in the wilderness. Such is the warning which St. Paul gives to the Corinthians against abusing the holiness of their Christian profession. But surely they are not the only people who require the warning! It is not possible for us indeed in this country to defile ourselves with heathen sacrifices, though I would not by any means undertake to answer for what our countrymen have done in heathen lands, but still it is but too possible to live unworthy of our Christian profession, to defile the body which the Christian professes to keep clean from all evil desires, as cleansed by the water of

baptism, and by intemperance in meat and drink to be unfit to partake of the spiritual meat and drink of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. It is too possible still to live in a state of continual contradiction to the holiness of a profession according to which we assert of ourselves, that we have been buried with Christ by baptism into the death of sin, that we have risen again unto newness of life, that we have put off the corrupt old man, and put on the new man, Christ, in his place; that we are vessels of sanctification and temples of the Holy Ghost. It is still possible to fall into the same sin, and therefore to be in danger of the same punishment.

And now to come from the general sense of the passage to the immediate words of the text, "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ;" that is, God continually, as they moved from place to place, supplied them in the dry wilderness with water, gushing out of the rock; and this water given to them to drink in this miraculous way, had a spiritual and, as it were, sacramental character, being an outward and visible token of God's especial protection over his chosen people; its refreshment therefore to the body should have been found refreshment also to the soul, which should have rejoiced in God's mercy, and poured itself forth in thanksgiving. Thus Israel was kept in a state of continual privilege by means

of grace continually reminding him of it ; and these were furnished to him by Christ his conductor ; He was, as it were, the rock which continually poured forth the living water both for body and for soul.

And is the Christian less abundantly provided for ? how can it be but that, being under the Gospel and not under the Law, under the fulfilment and not under the preparation, he should be much more excellently furnished ? If Christ followed, that is, attended, the Israelites every where and at every time with his rock of living water, how much rather now does He attend the people called after his own name, with still superior blessings ! How still more gloriously present is that rock ! how still more impregnated with eternal life is its water ! What has our Lord Christ said Himself ? “ 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 everlasting life ¹.” And again, “ If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth in me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water ².” “ But this,” says St. John, “ spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive ; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified ³.”

¹ John iv. 14.

² John vii. 38.

³ John vii. 39.

From these passages it appears that the living water which Christ supplies continually to his people from his ever-present rock in the wilderness of this sinful world, is the word which He hath spoken to them, and the Spirit whom He hath sent unto them. And what can be more continually present to the faithful Christian than these two? Where can he go, and be without them, if they shall be, as they surely are, in his very heart? This then is the Christian profession, this we have all to maintain; thus we make Christ our attendant rock, and are refreshed when weary on our journey through the wilderness of this world.

And now do our hearts confess, and our lives proclaim the power of that word, flowing into them as living water from the rock of Christ. What promises comfort us? what assurances sustain us? what admonitions counsel us? what precepts teach us? what commandments exact our obedience? Are they of the word of God, or of the word of man? What says the heart in answer? The world is loud in its promises, and, like all persons who speak loudly in promising, is insincere; it endeavours to outbid the promises of everlasting life with the promises of this life, which end in everlasting death. It says, "Do this, and thou shalt live." And what is this? It is to put ourselves in faith into its hands, and not into Christ's; and though it continually breaks its word, yet it is believed con-

tinually, again and again, and God that cannot lie is disbelieved, yea often not even so much hearkened to as to be either trusted or dis-trusted.

Faithless man does not feel sure in his word, he will take the word of fellow-men sooner. And though Christ hath promised that to those who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, the food and the raiment shall be added, he will try to make sure of the last first, he will provide first for the things of the kingdom of this world, and let the things of the kingdom of God come as they may or can: and of course they never do come to such as do not believe the Lord, but trust to the world and the arm of flesh rather. What says the heart to this?

And does it take warning from the word of Christ, and especially from such admonitions as, "Be ye likewise ready," "Watch, for ye know not the day nor the hour," and such as the parable of the ten virgins, and of the talents, and of the vineyard, and of the fig-tree, and such as the judgment which He has pronounced upon unbelievers, however they may be called after his name? The world warns with its daily accidents, and is instantly and surely believed. A ship is sunk on a rock, and that rock is avoided ever after; but let there be ever so many shipwrecks of the faith in Jesus Christ, and hardly any one cares about them, or takes more heed to himself than before. A person is poisoned by

some herb, that herb is declared to be poison, and is carefully avoided ever after; but who takes warning from the deadly poison of unbelief with the like caution? who so readily listens to the word of God, when it declares that this thing and that thing is poison to the soul of man? Is the power of the word of Christ felt in the heart here?

And whose precepts are followed, those of the world, which are, that we should be men-pleasers, or those of the word of Christ, which say, that we should walk and please God? And whose commandments are obeyed, those of the world, which say, "Care not for God, and love thyself better than thy neighbour," "Keep every day, seventh and all, holy to me," "Fall down and worship me," or those of God, who commands us to "love Him with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength; and our neighbour as ourself; and to keep holy to Him, and Him only, the Sabbath-day; and to worship the Lord our God, and to serve Him only?"

When we set ourselves seriously down to answer such questions as these, then we are able to determine whether the power of the word of God be indeed in our hearts, and therefore whether the rock of Christ with its living water indeed follow us wherever we go on our journey through this world, and whether therefore we be

led by Him who alone can lead us to the promised land of everlasting life.

And do our hearts confess the power of his Spirit? The power of that Spirit is to cleanse. Are they clean? The power of that Spirit is to renew. Are they new? The power of that Spirit is to put life in them, so that they should grow as all things of life grow, and become daily more strong in might to think and do the will of God, and know the love of Christ; they then go on from strength to strength, and grace is received for grace.

This it is to drink of the spiritual rock which follows the people of God, and which rock is Christ. Thus He is ever present with them; and this presence of his is our profession. Shall we keep it no better than Israel did his? We who have been baptized unto Christ, and not unto Moses; we who have been given to eat and drink of the body and blood of Christ, and not of manna which may be chewed, and of water which may be swallowed; shall we not much rather hold fast our profession? Shall we not take warning from the judgments which happened unto Israel for ensamples, and watch heedfully, lest in our confidence of thinking to stand, we fall? We cannot stand, we must fall, and be overthrown in this wilderness of our earthly pilgrimage, if we be not refreshed continually in our decaying strength, and in the

hunger and thirst of our fainting souls, from drinking of the spiritual rock, which is Christ ; for without Him our souls faint and stagger for weakness, like drunken men. But they whose bodics fell in the wilderness never saw the promised land ; and shall we ever see the promised inheritance of the saints in light, if we fall in our souls and spirits by the way ? We must stand, and keep our standing ; and that can be done only by maintaining in our hearts the presence of that spiritual rock. Can it be there if we be inconsistent in our profession, if we neglect the abundant means of grace, if we slight the joyful hope of glory, if we abuse the high state of privilege to which in such free mercy we have been called ? No, verily ; such presence is then far away from us. So let none go on in perilous security, but let us all remember the Apostle's warning advice on this very subject, " Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

SERMON XVI.

OUR STEWARDSHIP.

Ninth Sunday after Trinity.

LUKE xvi. 2.

“ And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee ? Give an account of thy stewardship ; for thou mayest be no longer steward.”

It is quite plain that we can call nothing our own ; our very bodies, souls, and spirits are God's workmanship, and God can undo his work, and turn our bodies into dust again, and take our souls and spirits back again from this world at any moment that He pleases : and at every moment, if we will give it a few serious thoughts, we find ourselves entirely in his hands, depending upon Him for all that we have already, and all that we are to have in time to come. And seldom does a week pass away without our seeing God openly assert his power over us, and property in us, by giving to one, by taking from

another, by bringing one into the world, by taking another out of the world. Can we call our property our own? See how He sometimes brings even the rulers of the earth to poverty, and even in one moment. Can we call our abilities our own? Surely still less; we could not possibly procure them for ourselves, as we do property, and therefore they are peculiarly called talents; and we see God continually taking them away, when they have been abused, or have accomplished the service for which He gave them.

We are not owners then of any one thing that we call our own. Are we borrowers then? No. The borrower has only to give back as good as he received; but we are to give back better; we are to improve to the utmost of our means that which the Lord has put into our hands. Does He not distinctly tell us this in the parable of the talents, especially where He says to the slothful servant, "Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury¹?"

It is evident therefore what we really are; we are stewards; so this parable declares to us; so also our Lord tells us on another occasion, saying to Peter, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler

¹ Matt. xxv. 37.

over his household² ?” And St. Peter himself says, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God³.” But the steward has two things to look to, the one continually before him, which is the care and improvement of the property entrusted to him; the other coming but now and then at a certain season, which is rendering of his accounts. These are also our concern, with this awful difference, that while the steward of an earthly proprietor has commonly property of his own too, to which he has also to look, we have none of our own, but all, to the uttermost farthing, is entirely and absolutely the Lord’s. And while he has to render many accounts in the many years of his stewardship, we have but one to render, in one and the last year, on one and the last day, once for all, when we shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, that we may receive the things done in the body. The text has to do particularly with this latter consideration; but in order to put it before you more clearly, I must first call your attention to the former.

(1) Our stewardship has more to answer for in proportion to that which God hath bestowed upon us; the higher our rank, the greater our property, the better our education, the brighter our abilities, so much the greater is the account

² Luke xii. 42.

³ 1 Pet. iv. 10.

which we have to render, supposing all to have received equal means of heavenly grace, which in a Christian country cannot, without gross and wilful neglect, amounting in fact to positive rejection, be enjoyed in a less proportion by those who have been blessed with the greater advantages; but however it may be in the world, however here some men may seem to have little enough to answer for, the case is very different in the Church of God, of which all that look for salvation in Jesus Christ are members. There the parable of the talents tells us that the very least has received one talent; now the talent might be worth in our money at least 250*l.*, and would go as far as 300*l.* of ours. Only suppose then that God had been so extraordinarily bountiful that, while full as many as now had more, none had less than 300*l.*; what a state of comfort, wealth, and prosperity were this! what stirring activity would there be, among the prudent at least, to put all this money to account! How would men congratulate themselves upon being born in such a country! Then poverty could only arise from mismanagement, and the poor man would have to blame none but himself. Even if we were insensible ourselves to such a state of happiness, as it is the nature of man to become through being familiar with it, yet how would those who were without envy us! How would foreign nations, who so grudgingly envy us even our present state, look upon us, and covet our prosperity then!

But all this that we have been supposing of this country, is true of that better country, the Church of God ; there the King, our Lord Jesus Christ, in his exceeding riches and glory, is so bountiful, there his ministry of the word and of the Spirit is so large and free, there his spiritual treasures and heavenly gifts are poured forth so abundantly, that none, even the poorest, is not as well off, as comfortably provided with necessaries to the inward man, as at least the man who is provided with 300*l.* for necessaries to the outward man. Ought we not all to be thankful for the privilege of such a state ? is it not enviable indeed ? and have we not every one of us a most important stewardship to discharge ?

But many, though they do not dispute or wish to dispute this account of the matter, may reasonably wish to see it represented more distinctly ; I will therefore enter into particulars, so as to make it clear by example.

Of course it is impossible to declare all the opportunities which God puts into the hands of every member of his Church, dividing severally unto every one as He wills. These are different according to different persons and different circumstances, and are well understood and deeply felt by the faithful children of God. We can only mention in particular, and this is quite sufficient, those outward and general means of his grace, which all have the opportunity of enjoying. Let us then begin to count only from

that age when persons having confirmed and ratified the vows made for them in their baptism, are in full possession of every Christian privilege, have been admitted to all the responsibility of their stewardship; let us count from the age of fifteen what has been received from God in this way. At the age of twenty the Christian has to account then for 1826 days, each giving him two marked occasions of telling forth God's praise, and seeking his Holy Spirit, at morning and at night in prayer, the morning and the evening making the day. And he has had as many opportunities of reading the word of God, and as many opportunities of doing the will of the Lord; for surely not a single day comes without a call to duty. Then again he has had 260 Lord's days allowed him, on which he has had the great privilege of joining his brethren with one mouth and one mind of public praise and worship before the throne of God. He has also had at least thirty opportunities of executing the dying command of his crucified Saviour when He said, "Do this in remembrance of me," and ordained the bread for the communion of his body, and the wine for the communion of his blood. Then at least once a month we may venture to say that he has had, if he would receive it, some call to be watchful, some warning to be ready, in some accident either to himself, or in his own family, or in the neighbourhood, or in the report of public events; so that he has had sixty of

these. But how fast does this account increase with the course of years! Take the man of thirty, and see how the list stands.

Days of duty	5479
Stated times of prayer	10,958
Opportunities once at least a day of reading God's word	5479
Lord's days	782
Times of Lord's Supper	90
Especial calls and warnings	180
	<hr/>
Sum of account	22,968

A person of the age of forty-five has had the double of this sum, the man of sixty has had the treble of it. And this sum is the very least that a person of common seriousness and ordinary attention must know that he has received and has to account for.

Surely this is no light account which we have to render. And the Lord Jesus Christ, who hath entrusted us with such a stewardship in his household, requires from us no careless eye-service, but the offering of the living sacrifice of the body, as dead to sin, and alive again unto righteousness, even as He died and rose again; and the devotion of our spirits in thoughts of sanctification through his Holy Spirit, and the affections of our soul in faith and love. With nothing less than such service can we fill up this account which we have to render, and we

should, in our hearts and prayers, render it unto the Lord daily.

And yet this is but a very rough outline, and can give but a faint notion of the real circumstances of our stewardship, which are far too numerous, far too intricate to be taken down by pen and ink; they are however written on the tables of the conscience, and our business is to see that the handwriting be not against us on the great day of account. And even if, from the deadness of the conscience, which the forgetfulness of the Lord's mercies brings on, the characters may not be seen there now, yet they have been stamped there, though as a dead body will not swell in any part that is struck as a living one always will, even so the conscience, however it may not answer to the blow of God's warnings now, and rise in marks and testify against the offender, yet if true repentance come, the day will come when being quickened with life it shall exhibit the wound, and the bruise, and the sore, and shall read out to the transgressor the items of his account; and blessed will he be if he find it in his heart to flee with all godly sorrow, with good hope of forgiveness, to that Lord who forgiveth his penitent servant the debt of even ten thousand talents.

(2) Thus we have seen the nature of our stewardship. Let us now turn to the question put in the text, "How is it that I hear this of

thee?" But God does not hear only, as did that earthly lord, He sees also: how little can we know of a man by what we hear of him, or even from him. If we had to account to God in this way, what a very short account comparatively it would be; and yet in itself what a long one. But when the question from the Lord is, "How is it that I see this in thee, even to the bottom of thy heart? How is it that I find a forgetfulness of my mercies, an unwillingness towards my service, a slothfulness towards improvement, an inattention to my commandments? How is it that thou hast been wasting my goods, which I entrusted to thy care? I gave thee golden opportunities of good and faithful service, and thou hast made nothing of them. I committed to thee the treasure of at least one talent, and one talent and no more it is still. I sent thee calls and warnings time after time, and thou art as careless as ever. I measured out to thee years, days, and hours, and thou hast returned them to the world and not to me. I gave thee the hallowed seasons of my Sabbaths, the solemn assemblies of my Church, the communion of the body and blood of my dear Son, and opened manifold channels of my grace, and loaded thee with many gifts, and where do I see their fruits?" When the Lord puts even such plain questions as these to us, and answers them thus for us, is it not time to awake? For

what are the very next words? "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward."

These questions then we should always have sounding in our ears. So infirm is our nature, that the most diligent require their warning; what then must be the need of the careless? If even that most laborious Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, St. Paul, thought it necessary to stir himself up with the thoughts of the day of account, telling, as he does, the Corinthians, that he "laboured that, whether present or absent, he may be accepted of the Lord, for that we all must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ¹," how continually must every Christian look towards that day, that he might be found blameless.

What can be more uncertain than this life? Hardly a week passes without the death of some one who seemed to have as many years before him as most of us. Should not such warnings say to all survivors, how much longer will it be before you also will be called to give an account of your stewardship, and you will be no longer stewards? And God of his merciful grace grant us to be prepared with that account, so that however we may be no longer stewards in this world, yet having been found faithful in that which was not our own, we may have given to us

¹ 2 Cor. v. 9, 10.

that which shall be our own, as being never to be taken from us, as are the things of our earthly stewardship.

He only who is a faithful steward of the Lord can estimate here the shame and misery of being no longer steward ; for he only values its privileges, and prizes its blessedness. But hereafter the most careless will know. They will see most clearly what an office they have lost, what a bishopric has been taken from them, which then it will be too late to recover ; they will then perceive and lament the many and precious opportunities which they suffered to pass by, and mourn over the selfish faithlessness with which they abused the trust of so many good things to body, soul, and spirit. Though they had no pleasure in being the Lord's stewards in this life, they will feel deeply indeed the pain of being stewards no longer in the life to come ; for he that is not a steward there will be in a state of beggary indeed, a beggary to be ashamed of indeed ! Happy would he think himself to be allowed to dig or beg. But no ; the Lord has taken away from him the stewardship, and not that only, but will have nothing to say to him as a labourer of any kind, even the lowest. He has done with him for ever. He has turned him out from every spot of his property where there is any work of good to be done. Where else then can his place be, but among those evil spirits who also once were stewards, but lost their first

estate, left their own habitation where God had assigned them their service, and have therefore been reserved in “everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day³?”

Surely if we are “fearfully and wonderfully made⁴,” it is for a fearful and wonderful end. Body, soul, and spirit were made into one man, that he may perform the high office of a steward, and not that he may eat and drink, and sleep, and take his own ease. So let us look to ourselves, that our whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Jude 6.

⁴ Psalm cxxxix. 14.

SERMON XVII.

SUBMISSION TO REPROOF.

(Tenth Sunday after Trinity.)

I KINGS xxi. 20.

“ And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord.”

COMPARE these words both of Ahab and Elijah with those of David and the prophet Nathan, which I so lately took for the text of one of my discourses. David was convinced of his sin, and cried out, “ I have sinned against the Lord;” and Nathan said to him in answer, “ The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.” How manifestly these words show the very different characters of these two kings. David had sinned even to murder, as Ahab had done; but his sin was contrary to his character; it was a strong delusion which suddenly came upon him, and as suddenly left him again; if it found

him in a moment's unwatchfulness, it left him with repentance for life; if it dimmed his conscience for awhile with blindness, it broke up in the most clear and open conviction; if he forgot the Lord in the height of the multitude of his mercies, he remembered Him again in the depth of the severity of his judgments. But on the contrary, the sin of Ahab was but the regular working of his wicked character; he committed it with his eyes as open as ever, and plotted it and accomplished it with the most deliberate purpose and cool wilfulness; he showed no signs of delusion, as David did, when Nathan came to him; he knew at once the message on which Elijah came, he understood clearly enough that it was to rebuke him with his sin, and to pronounce the judgment of God upon it; and so far from showing any sorrow for what he had done, and taking the prophet Elijah for his counsellor to instruct him how to repair his offence in such way as he possibly could, and seek forgiveness of God, and correct the evil example he had shown by one of a contrary nature, he called the prophet of God his enemy, because he was the enemy of his sin, which was still the darling of his heart, the idol of his affections. How clearly is his character manifested in his speech: "Hast thou found me?" showing thus that he cared for nothing but his sin being found out. The sin itself was nothing to him; he was ready to commit it

again, and as much more, if only it was not found out. He loved the sin, but he hated the judgment; and, therefore, he considered as an enemy any one who should tell him of it, even though that should be a prophet of the Most High God; yes, and the more so, because he was a prophet of the Most High God; for Ahab, like all wicked men, kept God out of his thoughts as much as possible; he knew that the Lord our God is a consuming fire upon the wicked, and therefore he disliked the sight of his servants; he knew that they were God's messengers to him; and what message could he expect from God but a threat of judgment? He knew that he was at enmity with God, and therefore that God was at enmity with him, and therefore that Elijah his servant must be his enemy, and must have come to him with a very unwelcome announcement; so, on the bare sight of the prophet, before he had time to open his lips, he forestalled all that he was going to say, and cried out, half in indignation, half in terror, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"

And is Ahab the only one who has done likewise? The wicked Herod also, being reproofed for his sin by John the Baptist, shut him up in prison, and ended with beheading him; and there is nothing which the wicked hate so much, and which makes them so revengeful, as the reproof of their sins. What

does God Himself, through the mouth of his wisest servant Solomon, say of them? "Ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof¹." The heart of the wicked is proud, and therefore will not endure reproof. The conscience of the wicked is sore, and therefore will not endure reproof. He is afraid of judgment, and therefore will not endure reproof. On the contrary, the godly says with David, "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head²."

The wicked care not for sin except to commit it: it is the discovery of the sin which they dread. As long as it is secret, or unnoticed, they will be as easy as if God Himself never saw it, as if as long as they hid it from man, it was hidden from God also. The reproof of it, therefore, tells them two very disagreeable things at once, that man notices it, and that God knows it, and threatens them with punishment for it both in this world and in the next: it also puts their sin under its true shape before their eyes, without any of the disguises with which their willingly-deceitful and deceived hearts had clothed it; and that shape is hideous even to their own eyes, when held up steadily before them in reproof. What wonder that they should so dis-

¹ Prov. i. 25.

² Psalm cxli. 5.

like reproof, and should set down their reprov-er for their enemy ?

But the day of reproof must come sooner or later. "These things hast thou done," says God, "and I kept silence ; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself : but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes³." At all events, the last day will be a day of reproof, and then the sins of the wicked will be set in order before their eyes, one after another, as they led on from one to another ; in their proportion, as every one became greater than that which went before ; in their consequences, as they spread ruin and mischief among souls in the flock of Christ and Church of God ; in their opposition to God's commandments, according as each broke his law ; in their dishonour to his holy name, according as the bad example of each has taught men to blaspheme it. All this will come at length when Jesus Christ, who has already come to save the world, shall then come to judge the world. The Lord will find the wicked on that day, and they will see in Him an everlasting enemy, whom they might have made an everlasting friend.

Such was the conduct of the wicked Ahab ; so different from that of David, who immediately submitted to the reproof of the prophet Nathan, and acknowledged his sin in repentance and

³ Psalm l. 21.

tears. And how different was the answer of the prophet Elijah ! Does he say any thing of putting away his sin ? does he promise that he shall not die ? Just the contrary, as Ahab's conduct was the contrary : " I have found thee," says Elijah, " because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord." He returns, you see, his answer upon him, with a terrible threat, as much as to say, that he had found him out to pronounce God's judgment upon him ; he tells him that, king though he was to outward appearance, yet inwardly he was the vilest slave, for he had sold himself into the service of sin, and become the bondsman of Satan, to work evil in the sight of the Lord. But as king of God's people what was he but the highest of his servants, set therefore to do his choicest work, and bound therefore to be an example of dutifulness and faithful love ? How shocking to have become the lowest slave, to do the vilest work of the enemy of God ! But if this so much increased the condemnation of Ahab, how much more will it do that for every unfaithful Christian ! For is not the Christian called in Scripture a king, because his profession is that of one who has been created anew after the image of Christ, the everlasting King, who has been endowed with most precious gifts, to which gold and silver are indeed but the dust of the earth, who has been adorned with a crown of life and sceptre of righteousness, and thus prepared with

excellent and abundant means for doing the service of the Lord in its very noblest department, of bringing honour and glory to his name? Is it not sad to falsify so high a profession? Is the unfaithful Christian any thing less than the lowest slave of Satan? For how must he be changed from the example of his profession! what a sale must he have made of all the precious inheritance to which he was called, and bartered the world to come for this world, the pure joys of heaven for the impure pleasures of this mortal life, where he can set himself down to the work of sin! The difference between him that sits on the throne of earthly power, and him that sits breaking stones on the highway, is a trifle compared with that between the faithful and unfaithful Christian. The faithful Christian is beyond all comparison superior to the one, the unfaithful beyond all comparison inferior to the other; for the unfaithful is a slave, sold under sin: he has lost his own will, the eyes of his conscience have been put out, he is bound and fettered with the chain of sin, and what intolerable task-work is his service. When do you see in the man who is serving sin any of that cheerfulness of heart, that bright enjoyment of hope, that calm serenity of mind, which carries the faithful Christian through the miseries of this sinful world? You may see, indeed, in him, a day's boisterous merriment, but then see the next day's wretched gloomi-

ness ! You may see in him a fit of exceeding enjoyment of pleasure, but then comes, without fail, according to God's unchangeable law in all worldly things, the fit of pain in proportion to the pleasure. He may become tired and sick even of pleasure ; and what remains for him then ? Murmuring and fretfulness as to the things of this world, and if for a moment he venture to look forth beyond this unsatisfactory world, he beholds judgment to come—there ends his prospect. Sad amusement this for hours which remain after pleasure is gone !

It is bad enough for one man to be sold by another, but for a man to sell himself is an act of such unnatural desperation as is seldom heard of, and indeed is never allowed among civilized nations. The law will not allow a man, however willing he may be, to prostitute his rank of citizen to such a shameful degree. If such an act then can be so vile in this mortal body, what must it be in the immortal soul and spirit ? What name can be found out by which to name its vileness ? The law of God will not, indeed, allow any sellers of their birthright of spiritual liberty in Christ Jesus to abide in his eternal city, in the Jerusalem which is above and is free ; but all such slaves, all that have sold themselves under sin, will be cast out from his presence into the place and company of the master into whose service they have sold themselves.

So do the words of Elijah, addressed to Ahab, preach also unto us. But, however, Ahab's heart could not withstand the terror of the judgment which the prophet pronounced against him. He repented, and sincerely for the time, otherwise God would not have accepted his repentance as we see He did. O that all hearts that hear the terrible judgment which the word of God pronounces against all that have sold themselves to work evil in the sight of the Lord, would repent likewise! What is the temporal judgment pronounced upon Ahab, compared with the eternal judgment pronounced upon them? What is the threat of Elijah, that Ahab's body should lie for dogs to lick his blood, compared with the threat of our Lord, that the body and soul of the sinner shall be destroyed in hell? Is it not a call to repentance indeed? And if God's judgment upon Ahab be of awful example indeed, is not the acceptance of the repentance of such a person most encouraging? is it not a bright exemplification of the truth of those words of the prophet Ezekiel, which stand in the front of our Prayer-book, inviting us to the confession of our sins? "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive⁴." Let every face then be turned unto God, and let every one

⁴ Ezek. xviii. 27.

consider how all this world comes to nothing before the world to come. How plainly has God declared this in the difference of his treatment of David and of Ahab! David's repentance was deep and lasting, so God forgave him his sin in the world to come, but He retained it in this world; on the contrary, the repentance of Ahab was shallow and short, so God forgave him his sin in this world, but retained it in the next; in short, He dealt with each according to the purpose of his heart. David looked to the judgment of the world to come; Ahab to that of this world only. But God considered that in David's case the life to come outweighed all considerations of this life, and therefore freely left him to the judgment of this life, both for example to others and trial to himself. David's repentance then is our example. If a man repent like Ahab, only through fear of the loss of something in this world, then the utmost he will gain will be the being spared that loss, and he will miserably miscalculate if he shall think that his sins have been forgiven too. The grand token of the forgiveness of sins is the being found by the Lord where He has set us, not having sold ourselves to work evil in his sight, but having devoted ourselves to his service to do nothing but what is lawful and right in his sight.

SERMON XVIII.

THE SOLDIER OF CHRIST.

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

2 KINGS xix. 34.

“ For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake.”

protection and deliverance of his people at any time must for ever after be their comfort and encouragement. He has thus plainly shown that his promise, which He has given in those words of the ninety-first Psalm, saying, “ Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling¹,” that this shall never fail. The present chapter sets before us a remarkable example of this. Judah had returned unto God, and made the most High his habita-

¹ Psalm xci. 9, 10.

tion, and, therefore, the Lord would not let the threatened evil of destruction befall him, but saved the city. He assured his faithful servant Hezekiah by a message through his prophet; and, thus supported, that just and pious king never lost courage. Though the innumerable host of the Assyrians surrounded his city, as the waves surround the ship in a storm, ready every moment to pour in; though the wall shook with his engines of war, and the air was full of his arrows and fiery darts, and the ears were deafened with the blast of so many trumpets, the rattling of so many chariots of war, the shouts of such an enormous host, he cared not for all this threatening of man. His prayer for his people had been accepted by God, and in God he put his trust, and defied all that man could do.

But the example is the more encouraging when we consider who and what were really represented by Hezekiah and Jerusalem. This earthly Jerusalem was but a type of the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, his Church: and Hezekiah was but a type of the King of that heavenly city, Jesus Christ our Lord. And if Jerusalem was safe from Sennacherib and his Assyrians with Hezekiah in it, how much more shall the Church of God be safe from the devil and his angels with Christ in it! He is its King, to save and defend all that are in it. He is its High-priest, as Melchizedek was

both king and priest of Salem, to plead for it before the throne of God, and as Hezekiah pleaded for his people; so that whosoever is found in this city shall live for ever. Nothing shall avail against him, though Satan come at the head of all the powers of the world around us, and the world beneath us; for he is with Christ, the Captain of salvation, he is under the especial care and protection of Him from whose love, St. Paul says, nothing shall separate his people, neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword. All the heirs of eternal life are to be found no where else but in this city; and none but they have any abiding place in it.

But I have been born, baptized, and bred in the Church of God, a man may say, am I not therefore in this city? You are, undoubtedly, in possession of a very high privilege, it may be answered. You have experienced a mercy which has been denied to three out of four of the generation of men now living; you have been enrolled as a soldier of Christ, you have been taught the exercise of his arms, you have been shown his banner and bidden to fight under it. But are you really serving in his service? Are you watching on the walls of his eternal city against the assaults of its enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil? And do you put your whole trust and confidence in Him, and Him only? Such are the dwellers in that city.

A city contains a promiscuous multitude, and the vicious and idle together with the virtuous and industrious. But when an enemy comes up against it to take it, what is done then? It is surrounded with a wall and a ditch, and all un-serviceable persons, all useless mouths, (as they are called,) are sent out of it. But this is also the case with the city and Church of God. An enemy has been encamped against it from the very beginning; and, therefore, there has been no room in it but for faithful soldiers and sworn defenders. A man may be born in it; but what of that? If he will not do his duty in it, he will be turned out of it as an useless mouth; he, in fact, turns himself out, if he do not according to the commandments of the everlasting King, the Captain of salvation, who reigns over it for ever. "Blessed," says St. John, "are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie."

Blessed, then, are they that dwell there! They are in a city which the Lord defends to save it for his own sake, and for his Son Jesus Christ's sake. The world may rave and rage with calamity and affliction against them, the flesh may hurl his fiery darts of temptation at them, the devil may assault with violence and fraud, but these shall not prevail against them;

these shall be driven back in confusion, because their trust is in God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, this is the very badge by which a soldier of this everlasting city is known. Has he faith in God? does he believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, so as to love Him and keep his commandments? How can he otherwise be in company with Christ? how can he otherwise be dwelling in the presence of God? And having this faith, he purifies himself, even as God is pure. He remembers where he is, under the eye of his Captain of salvation, and is therefore diligent in his Christian duty; and in the face of his spiritual enemies, and therefore watchful against them. He remembers that his banner is the cross of Christ, by which he must deny himself and follow Him. Thus he walks circumspectly, looking out for occasions of good service, and against occasions of temptation. He is a man of prayer to God, and of example to man. He has always something to do, for God's service never stands still with his true servants. Like that faithful servant Hezekiah, he goes up into the house of the Lord, and spreads before Him there the letter which this world writes against the soldiers and servants of God, threatening them with all its vengeance for not obeying it rather than God, and not paying it the tribute of the offerings of their substance, not wasting on it their health and their wealth of body and of soul. For surely this world is like that Assyrian king, who would be master of the

people of Jerusalem and all that they had. It would have us entirely under its dominion, utterly its slaves, occupying all our service, employing all our thoughts, receiving the tribute of all the treasure of our heart. And when, like the good and faithful Hezekiah, that model of the spiritual king, we refuse, then it endeavours to frighten us into a surrender by threats of loss and disgrace. "I will withdraw such and such support," it says. "I will inflict such and such damage. I will stir up such and such an one against you. I will leave you no rest, no peace. There shall be no help for you in your God against that which I will bring upon you. See what I have already done to others. Has their God helped them? Where is now their God? Trust not, therefore, in the Lord thy God."

Such is the threatening letter which the power of this world writes to the faithful servant of God daily, and which that servant of God, going up in the lifting up of his heart into the house of the Lord, into his heavenly presence there, which he makes through faith in Christ and illumination of his Holy Spirit, spreads before the Lord in his daily prayer. "Lord, bow down thine ear," he cries, "and hear; open, Lord, thine eyes and see, and hear the words of the prince of this world, which hath sent him to reproach the living God." It is true that he has prevailed against many, as he says; but why? Because they made not thee their God, but

made idols for themselves out of the sinful desires of their own hearts. Therefore they are fallen. "Now, therefore, O Lord my God, I beseech thee, save me out of his hand, that all may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only."

Such, according to the model of Hezekiah's prayer, is the daily prayer of the servant of God, watching in his holy city, and resisting there the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and he has a message through a greater prophet than Isaiah to assure him; he has a message through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who assures him, that "if the world hate him, he must know that it hated himself, even Jesus, before it hated him²;" and hath also told him, "In the world thou shalt have tribulation: but be of good comfort, I have overcome the world³." And he is put in mind by these and such like assurances, that he is in that city of which God hath said, "that he will defend it to save it," not for his servant David's sake, to whom, indeed, he made the promise of the Saviour, but for the sake of one much greater than he was, who was, indeed, according to the flesh, the Son of David, but according to the Spirit, his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, who purchased the redemption of his people in that city with his own precious blood.

² John xv. 18.

³ John xvi. 33.

Will not God now deliver him? Will He not save him? Are not all the hairs of his head numbered? and can he not say joyfully in the words of the Psalm, "Blessed be the Lord, for he hath showed me his marvellous kindness in a strong city⁴?" The Lord turns aside the arrows of the enemy, and spreads his shield before him; and the host of sin is dead, as the army of Sennacherib; God hath given him the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.

But meanwhile, what is the lot of him that is not within this city, but without it? Is he not in the midst of the enemy as much as any one of the Jews outside Jerusalem was in the midst of the army of Sennacherib? And what can he expect, therefore, but captivity and death? Satan has him in the bonds of sin, and in those bonds he will die in a land far distant from the city of God, as sin is from holiness. What hope can he have, when he is so far from all the means of God's merciful deliverance? There is, plainly, nothing for him but despair.

But who are they who are without the city? Who can they be but such as are not living according to their Christian profession? And such are they who are alive unto sin to do it, instead of dead to it, as having forsaken it. Such are they who are not advancing on the course of perfection; for they must be careless and in-

⁴ Psalm xxxi. 21.

different, negligent in duty, unwatchful, unmindful of their Master's orders; such cannot be good soldiers of Christ; and, as we have seen, none but good soldiers, such as will watch carefully, obey orders diligently, and fight resolutely the fight against the powers of sin, can be allowed to stay in the city of God, and Church of his Christ. They are without also, who, forgetting that God Almighty created them for instruments of his service, and upholders of his honour and glory, think of serving nobody but themselves, and so far from giving God any thing, rob Him even of that day which He has reserved to Himself, to be spent in thanking and honouring Him, grudging to give Him back in thanks one-seventh of the whole life which He has given. They also are without, who are living in fellowship with any work of darkness, who are indulging the sinful appetites of the body, who are not walking circumspectly according to the Spirit, but in all carelessness after the flesh; in short, all they are without who do not show the working of a renewed heart in growing improvement, who are not going forward in their Christian course, advancing in the multitude of good resolutions, and in sincerity of accomplishing them. What is the character of the good soldier, who is retained in the service of a besieged city? Does he not daily grow in confidence in his commander, in experience of the enemy, in knowledge of his duty, in patience

of labour, in attention to orders, in strength of body, in exactness of discipline, in watchfulness against a surprise, in acuteness of observation, in good heart and firm courage? and can the soldier of Christ in the eternal city of his Church be otherwise? Can he be of little faith in the Lord? can he be ignorant of the enemy with whom he has to deal, slothful, negligent, impatient of obedience to God's commandments, irresolute in his duty towards Him, unwatchful against the devil, and even doing his work rather than God's? No, indeed; he is a very different person from this, for he grows daily more stedfast in the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, more abundant in the fruits of his Spirit, more faithful in the stewardship of his grace, more quick and more sound in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, more hardy to endure hardness, more resolute "to fight the good fight of faith," more exact in obedience to the will of the Lord. This, then, is the general sign, as to whether we be in this city or not; sincerity of improvement, which is the necessary fruit of a renewed heart, showing the new and healthy life there, even as the green fresh shoot declares the life of the tree; but the unrenewed heart discovers nothing but hollowness within and corruption without; it cannot enable a man to perform a single duty of the soldier of Christ, but on the contrary, disables him for all; and of course, there is no room found for such an one

in that city of life and light, of holiness and watchfulness, of soul and spirit, of truth and diligence.

What a sad message to receive, "There is no room for you!" there is room for the faithful in Christ, but none for you! there is room for the children of God, but none for you! there is room for the soldiers of faith, but none for you! But this is the message which has gone forth from God, and is on its way to every careless professor of the truth in Christ; and if he be careless still, he will be cast out for ever.

But what a message of comfort and good courage comes to the faithful soldier of Christ, whose conscience assures him that he is in that city doing his duty there! "I will defend this city, to save it," says the Lord; and therefore his servant laughs to scorn, and shakes his head in derision, at the proud and vain attempts of his spiritual enemies, numerous and powerful host though they be; he despises their threats, puts his whole trust in the Lord, performs his will, and thus in patience awaits the crown of glory which shall come on the head of every faithful soldier, when at the last day the siege of the city of God shall be raised, its gates shall be opened for everlasting peace, and its enemies shall be destroyed for ever from before the presence of the Lord.

SERMON XIX.

SPIRITUAL IDOLATRY.

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

2 KINGS xxiii. 2.

“ And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great : and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord.”

WHY should there be such a gathering as this ? why should all the mighty, all the good, and all the wise, all the great with all the small, make such a point of going into the house of the Lord on this occasion ? Why should they make such a public display about an ordinary duty, such as assembling in the house of the Lord ? For two reasons. (1) Because that duty had become an extraordinary one, through the long neglect of it. Josiah had now completed the repairs of the house of the Lord, which had fallen into ruin, because the people had gone after strange and false gods, and built them altars and temples,

and served and worshipped them. What an appalling list of them is given in this very chapter, from the work of Solomon on the high places before Jerusalem, down to the work of Manasseh, who set up altars to his false gods in the very courts of the Lord's house! (2) And the other reason was, because they were desirous to hear the word of the Lord. Was it then so strange to this chosen people of God, who had been charged to "teach it diligently unto their children, and talk of it when they sat in their house, and when they walked by the way, and when they lay down, and when they rose up; and were to bind it for a sign upon their hand, and make them as frontlets between their eyes, and write them on the posts of their house, and on their gates¹?" How could it become strange to such a people? Yet so it was. The book had actually been lost. The high-priest himself, the chief minister of God, whose business it was to minister according to it, actually knew nothing about it, until it was found by him in cleaning out the house of the Lord.

These were indeed two good reasons for this solemn assembly of all the people in the Lord's house. But what a terrible lesson does it read to us! We read in this morning's lesson the account of a wonderful deliverance of his people by Almighty God out of the hands of their ene-

¹ Deut. vi. 7-9.

mies, when to the eye of man their situation was utterly hopeless. We should expect that this would have awakened them, especially as God had performed it on their turning back, under the pious Hezekiah, from their false gods to the true and living God ; yet here, in the third generation from that time, we find the altars and temples of the false gods up again, and the word of God lost, not only out of the hearts, but of the very sight and ears of the people. Once again, however, and, alas! for the last time, both the temple and that word were restored under the care of the pious Josiah ; and the people of God once again, and for the last time, showed themselves as the people of God.

Such is the example before us ; the example of a people, too, in whose place we are standing, being grafted in as a wild olive, in place of the branches which had been broken off because of unbelief. And, therefore, we stand by faith and continuance in his goodness, otherwise we shall be cut off also. And their example is our example, as we have been told by St. Paul. Let us review, then, some of the plainest applications of this example. (1) St. Paul warns us, saying, “ Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them ².” But it may be said that we are not in the least danger of being idolaters. We are thoroughly convinced of its besotted

² 1 Cor. x. 7.

folly and desperate wickedness. But then, there are always two things to all our dealings with God,—there is the spirit, and there is the deed ; and the deed depends upon the spirit for its quality, as the fruit depends upon the nature of the tree for its kind. Although, therefore, we bow not down before the work of our own hands, putting it in the place of God, we may bow down before the work of our own hearts, and put that in the place of God. And this idolatry may go on while the other is scorned and mocked at. For what is the worship of God ? In what does its essence consist ? Is it not in lifting up the thoughts and affections of the heart unto God on his throne in heaven, and acknowledging Him as our maker and continual keeper ? Thus God is the first and last object of the heart ; but an idol is a thing of this world, put in the place of God. It needs not to be outside us, made of metal, wood, or stone, and to have the bows of our knees, the spreading of our hands, the kisses of our lips, and the uplifting of our eyes. It may be inside our hearts, since the essence of an idol is that which withdraws our affections from God, and lowers them down from his throne on high, to the things upon earth ; and, therefore, the objects of all engrossing desires in the heart are idols ; and, as St. Paul says, all covetousness, that is, inordinate desire of any thing earthly, is idolatry. There are, therefore, as many idols as there are such

desires in the hearts of men; and in this spiritual sense, surely Athens is not the only city that either has been, or is, or will be, wholly given to idolatry.

O how is the heart in its devotion to the things of this world full of images, which it worships, in the place of the Maker of this world and all therein, with the kiss of affection, with the bowing of the spirit, with the adoration of the soul! But of one image only will God allow in the heart for worship, and not reckon it idolatry; in one image will he allow Himself to be honoured, and in one only; and what is that? It is the image of Himself. But how shall we possibly have the image of God, whom no man hath seen, neither can see, in our hearts? How can we come to any imagination of Him, the like of whom our eyes have never seen? He hath given us this image of Himself in our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom St. Paul says, "that He is the image of the invisible God³," "the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person⁴;" and who says concerning Himself, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father⁵;" if, therefore, He shall be dwelling in our hearts by faith, then we have there the image of God, and we are worshipping Him in spirit and in truth. And this, therefore, is necessary to our worship, the keeping

³ Col. i. 15.

⁴ Heb. i. 3.

⁵ John xiv. 9.

his image there, not letting the things of this world to take its place, but looking upon Him crucified by crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts ; looking upon Him dead, by our death unto sin ; looking upon Him as risen again, by our new life unto righteousness ; looking upon Him ascended into heaven, by setting the affections on things above ; looking on Him as coming again, through the denial of all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and in the blessed hope of his glorious appearing. To this worship we have all been called, and to this all must turn from the vain idols of worldly desires ; and kings, and men, and priests, and prophets, and all the people, both great and small, must go up to the house of the Lord, by the lifting up of their hearts, and there ratify the covenant which they have made with Him, to walk in his ways all the days of their life, and to hold Him even as He is, " Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever ⁶."

(2) That the word of God should be lost out of the hands and hearts of idolaters, who can wonder ? It expressly forbids idolatry of every kind, both within and without the heart: it says, " Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve ;" and it is full from beginning to end of severe rebuke and awful threats against all that are holding the truth in

⁶ Heb. xiii. 8.

unrighteousness, knowing that the Lord God is a jealous God, that will not share his honour with another, and yet preferring to his worship and service the devotion to the world, and the service of the flesh. Of course a man will not be forward to condemn himself, and therefore will not be ready to open a book which at every opening calls him to account: thus this idolater loses sight of the word of God. Nor can there be a more evident sign of idolatry than the neglect of this book. We know that a Church that is given to outward idolatry will not so much as suffer it to be read, but locks it up as fast as it can, and would not care were it lost altogether, would think indeed the loss to be the greatest gain imaginable. And we know that much in the same way, the man that is an idolater, in the sense in which St. Paul calls him such, putting this world in the place of Christ, will have as little relish for the word of God, and would gladly put it out of the world if he could. And the first token of sincere repentance is now, as it was in the days of Josiah: men go up to the house of the Lord to hear the word of God; they go to his house in the place of the public assembly of his people; they go to his house in the inner chamber of their hearts; for then being bent on amendment, they desire reproof, they wish to forsake the wrong way for the right, they long to understand the will of God that they may do it; to hear his sentence

upon sin, that they may justly dread and abhor it; to listen to his promise of pardon, that they may lay fast hold of it; to hear the call to repentance, that they may instantly and sincerely obey it; thus the word which was before full only of rebuke, now abounds to them with consolation; that which smote their consciences now soothes them.

Such is the example of Israel in these two particulars; and we have need to look beyond the present chapter to conclude with a full application. We then find that however sincere he might have been for a time, he fell back into his old ways, until he finally provoked Almighty God to destroy that city in which he would not serve the Lord, and to level to the earth that temple in which he would not worship Him. And even so, if the Christian's repentance shall be equally but for the moment, and fruitless of any lasting effect, the Lord will remove him from the city of God, He will not consider him any longer amidst his people, and He will utterly banish him from his temple, He will not consider him as his worshipper. This, indeed, He commonly leaves the man, in the infatuation of his gross heart, to do for himself, and work out his own destruction with his own willing hands; and hence you will find him purposely absenting himself from the house of God, and evidently determined not to read his word. But what must be the final consequence? He that would

not join in worshipping God upon earth, cannot possibly be gathered to the company of his worshippers in heaven; and he that disliked God's word and commandments in this life, will not have any enjoyment in praising Him, in obeying Him, in the life to come! But now, while the Lord graciously allows time and opportunity, let his worship be the desire of the heart, and let his word be precious beyond all price.

SERMON XX.

THE LEADING OF THE SPIRIT.

Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity.

GAL. V. 18.

“ But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.”

THESE words have before now been most mischievously mistaken by ignorant persons, who were glad enough to suppose that by Christian privilege they were put out of the reach of the law. The meaning is as follows :

The Holy Spirit of God puts into the heart of man the spirit of Christ, and this is the spirit to think and do “ whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ¹.” Now if a man have in himself the spirit for a thing, what needs he any outward ordinance to compel him to it? If a man, for

¹ Philip. iv. 8.

example, have the spirit of honesty, what has he to do with the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal?" He would have been just the same had that commandment of the law never been written; he does not require either its bidding or its threat of punishment; you may as well tell him, when he is determined not to go to such a place, that he shall not go to such a place. The law is not made to direct honest men, but to restrain knaves, as St. Paul says in another place, "The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners²," &c., and therefore, if all in this land had the spirit of Christ in them, being true Christians, the statute-book might be shut up, and the prisons pulled down.

To the man who is led by the Spirit, the works of the law of God are the natural outward working of his spirit, as natural to him as the very motion of his limbs; he does not want them to be written down, any more than he requires to be told that he must move his arms and legs, and they can neither condemn him, nor justify him; he is what he is without them, before he comes to them; and, as St. Paul says, he, "through the Spirit, waits for the hope of righteousness by faith³;" so independent is he of them.

Is it not manifest, then, that he who is led

² 1 Tim. i. 9.

³ Gal. v. 5.

by the Spirit is not under the law? Let us go on, then, to know more concerning this Spirit, in which we are called into such glorious liberty.

It is, as I have said, the spirit of Christ within a man, formed there by the renewing power of the Holy Spirit; it is the new, the inner, the spiritual man, and the walk of this man is, of course, a following of Christ, a continual working out of that which he believes; for instance, he believes that Christ was crucified, therefore he crucifies the flesh with the affections and lusts; he believes that Christ died, therefore he reckons himself dead unto sin; he believes that Christ rose again, therefore he reckons himself alive unto God through Him; he believes that Christ ascended into heaven, therefore he sets his affections on things above; he believes that Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, administering his kingdom, and interceding for his people, therefore he does all that his kingdom may come, and will be done, and is instant in prayer; he believes that Christ will come again to judge the quick and the dead, therefore he does the part of a faithful servant in watching and waiting for his Lord.

O that these articles of our belief, which the Church so appropriately makes us confess as we approach the throne of grace and mercy in the name of Jesus Christ, were not only in the understandings, but in the hearts of all people! until they be there, they enjoy not the liberty of

the Gospel, they are under the law, subjected by their disobedience to its penalties. They are pressed by its uneasy yoke and heavy burden; and he who thinks to make himself most free and independent of it, is sure to find himself caught again, and fastened in its bonds more straitly than ever. Let him, for instance, think to make himself free of the law of temperance, in a moment the law of God and the law of man are upon him, the one to punish his body with sickness, poverty, and death, his mind with fretfulness, his conscience with uneasiness; the other to visit his riotings with fine or imprisonment, and expose his character to general distrust and shame; so his attempt at liberty ends but in a much more odious slavery. Or let him endeavour to free himself, not from some obligation of the moral law, but even from some regulation of society, which has no place in the statute-book; let him despise manners, customs, and the like, make himself, in short, what is called a character; does he not pay the penalty, sooner or later, of such folly? does not even such law, trifling as he may think it, take vengeance upon him for its violated rules? And often, in the midst of his boasted liberty, some disagreeable consequences remind him that he is in bondage, and worse than that from which he thought to escape.

But the Gospel proposes to us to "look into

the perfect law of liberty⁴," and to speak and do as "they that shall be judged by the law of liberty⁵;" it is the "truth which makes us free⁶;" and the true Christian is a king indeed, not an earthly king, who, however absolute, finds himself continually at the bounds of his power, but a spiritual king, whom the world, carnal as it is, cannot fetter with restraint. Our notion of perfect liberty in the flesh is to do every thing that we like; but experience soon tells us that the notion is impossible. But the true Christian does every thing that he likes, for he does every thing from the heart, because of the spirit which is within him; he heartily rejects that which is evil, he heartily clings to that which is good, discerning them through the Spirit of truth, and loving one and hating the other, from the holy affections of a heart which has been renewed by the Holy Spirit.

This it is to be led by the Spirit; this is the liberty wherewith Christ hath made his people free. Shall we not desire to stand fast in it? Shall we surrender ourselves to the bondage of the law? Let us only consider a little farther the difference of these two states.

(1) To be under the bondage of the law, is

⁴ James i. 25.

⁵ Ibid. i. 12.

⁶ John viii. 32.

either to take merit to ourselves for obeying it, or to bring its vengeance upon us by disobeying it: in either case it is a hard master indeed. If a man take merit to himself, he can go very little way indeed before he finds that he can never satisfy the demands made upon him; if, at least, he have the sincerity seriously to consider what he is about. But they are not many who do thus seriously consider; the greater number are those who are content with the merit of a fair character, and therefore with doing just as much, and no more, as will secure it for them; but then they must continually do things most unwillingly indeed. For instance, should a person come to this house of God more from compliance with a custom in which he has been brought up, and which it is not decent to violate, and the violation of which may be even punished hereafter, than from a hearty love of joining his brethren in Christ, and appearing together with them in one spirit, one body, before the throne of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, then how unwillingly must this duty be often performed! How often must it appear a task, from which he is glad to escape with any excuse! And in any case, when the doing of his duty puts him to any inconvenience, how reluctant he is to set about it, how bitterly he complains of being put out of his way for other people, or for other business than his own! How does the spirit of selfishness chafe and fret

within him, and entirely destroy his peace and comfort! How does he murmur against laws as tyrannical, and customs as unreasonable, and would have no scruples in breaking both one and the other, if only at the same time he could keep his character undamaged!

Is not such a state of life bondage indeed? But besides this state of regard for respectability, there is the other, which has the contrary character, and in which the man cares only to gratify himself; this man soon comes under the very bodily fetters, and into the very bodily prison-house, of the law, human and divine, and therefore I need say no more about him.

(2) Surely, then, there is no real liberty but that wherewith the Gospel of Christ makes us free. Let me state a few particulars of this also.

The man of God, continuing in the word of Christ, and led by the Spirit, uses the law as he does a road; he is not guided by it, any more than a man perfectly acquainted with a country is guided by it, but he uses it to travel along through this world, and he delights in it, as in a road to a better place, and as in the exercise of his spirit. As for the commandments of God, he loves them, and in his statutes he meditates. The word of God is a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path. He feels no unwillingness, he has no mind for pleading ex-

cuses and making delays ; but he deplors the weakness of the flesh, which in this body of sin cannot follow up the willingness of the spirit, and he strives to put to full account all the means which God hath so graciously given in Jesus Christ our Lord, for enabling him to keep the precepts and testimonies of the Lord. He takes to himself no merit for keeping them, any more than for eating or drinking, or satisfying any craving of his nature : the leading of the Spirit makes the will of God his will, and therefore doing the will of God is doing his own will, so that while he keeps the law he is not subject to it. Such a thing as an excuse from any duty towards God or man will never enter his head ; he does not palter and equivocate about the letter of the law, which thus kills so many, who substitute their own will under false titles for God's will, and keep a small and trifling part at the expense of a great and vital part, as did the Pharisees, and as do all self-deluders and hypocrites. He is possessed of its life-giving spirit, and he can no more fix on one part only to do it, than he can divide spirit into two. How can such an one do otherwise than "love the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his strength, with all his mind ; and his neighbour as himself⁷?"

Such is the leading of the Spirit ; and to such

⁷ Luke x. 27.

leading we must continually strive to bend our stubborn wills, and subdue our rebellious flesh ; thus we must exercise the privilege of our calling to be children of God, and members of his household ; for all the family of heaven are led by the Spirit of God, who directs their will, rules their affections, maintains the light of their understandings. And as the child is eager for the liberty and privileges of manhood, even so the child of God is eager to be freed from all the fetters which the imperfection of his present condition lays upon the freedom of his spirit, and earnestly desires that happy state, where, as there is no sin, there will be no law. How does it become us all, as professing so glorious a calling, to walk in the Spirit with all circumspection and watchfulness, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit with all diligence and earnest labour in the Lord, looking steadily and joyfully to the end, when the spirits of all just men made perfect shall dwell in the everlasting city of the living God !

SERMON XXI.

THE STATE OF THE FORGIVEN.

First Sunday in Advent.

ISAIAH i. 18.

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

THE Lord is here entering into a controversy with his people, setting before them their sins and his mercies, and what He will do still for them, and what He expects from them in return. So significant is the opening of the prophecy of Isaiah, who proclaimed beforehand the blessings of the Gospel of the Christ to come with such clearness, that he has been called the Evangelical prophet. And at this season, when our Church bids us look especially towards the Advent or second coming of the Lord, we could not surely have begun with a more appropriate

lesson ; for the very first thing to have in mind on such an occasion is, that God hath a controversy with his people, openly and solemnly in the hearing of heaven and earth as witnesses ; that He hath occasion to say to them, " Come, and let us reason together," and to ask them if He has not done every thing for them, and what they have done in return for Him. Surely it is a time, when such a prospect is before us, to make up the accounts of our stewardship, to number up his mercies and blessings, to think upon our short-comings. And when we have made them up, what would be our prospect of the judgment to come at the Advent of our Lord, if we had not the gracious promise, the cheering consolation, which is contained in those words, " Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool ?"

Sins are here likened to scarlet and crimson dye, and with good reason indeed. For, first of all, scarlet and crimson are the most glaring and flaunting of colours ; and sin is a most audacious as well as self-delusive appearance, under which man affronts the majesty of God in the sight of heaven and earth. Scarlet and crimson, also, are the blush of shame. And what so shameful as sin, or rather what can be shameful but sin ? Scarlet and crimson are also the colour of blood ; and blood is on the head of every sinner, as St. Paul told the unbelieving

Jews when they refused to be converted from their sins, "Your blood be upon your own heads." And scarlet and crimson were (whatever they may be now) colours which it was beyond all men's power and skill to discharge from the cloth which had been once dyed with them. And is it not equally beyond all man's power to cleanse his own soul from the dye of sin? Where shall he wash himself and be clean from it? What drug shall he use that may remove its stain?

In so short a compass is represented to us, by this comparison of the prophet, the real nature of sin, its conspicuousness, its audaciousness, its destructiveness, and its irreparable damning mark upon the soul of man. We have sometimes occasion to pity persons who are obliged to show themselves in public with the loathsome outward appearance of some wretchedly painful disease, which is inwardly destroying them inch by inch day by day. But what is this to the appearance of sinful man in the face of heaven, with all the soul-destroying marks of sin upon him? But, though in this miserable condition, he does not pity himself; the Lord has compassion upon him, the Lord hath wrought deliverance for him from this devouring plague, the Lord hath taken away his shame, the Lord hath removed the blood which was upon his head, and hath even taken it upon Himself. "The blood of Jesus Christ

the Son of God cleanseth us from all sin¹." What good news is this indeed! what glad tidings to the heart which is looking forward to the Advent of the Lord, and considering how it shall meet the approaching judgment, what defence it shall make in the controversy which the Lord shall then hold with it, what answer it shall give to the questions which shall be put upon the use of so many and manifold privileges and gifts! Where is the shout of joy that can be loud enough? where is the song of triumphant thankfulness which can be glad enough?

But let us not deceive ourselves; let us not mistake the real nature of this unbounded mercy; let us not take occasion from the ease with which Christ hath accomplished this for us, to make ourselves easy about sin, and to commit it, and to persist in it, under the notion that all that we shall have so done will be as certainly undone for us, and that the stain may be as readily contracted by us, as it can be washed out again by the blood of Christ. Men are too apt to go upon such a notion, and altogether to lose sight of what is required on their part. For are there not two parties in the affair of sin, two parties engaged in the controversy of the Lord? And is one to have all of it to himself, and the other none? Is Christ to take all upon Him, without man even stirring

¹ 1 John i. 7.

himself, yea, even a finger, so much as to lay the burden upon Him? We must stir ourselves, my brethren, we must feel for ourselves, we must acknowledge to our own hearts and consciences the guilt of our sinful nature, we must lay our sins upon Christ with tears of repentance, and in a lively faith in his power of redemption. And by this very act we renounce sin; in casting it on Christ we cast it away from ourselves. How then can we any longer have to do with it? When the cloth has been discharged of its scarlet dye, does it remain scarlet? Is it not white as snow? When it has been discharged of its stain of crimson, does it continue crimson? Is it not white as wool? So, also, when we have obtained forgiveness of our sins, so that we shall have washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, can we show any longer the scarlet and bloody stain of sin? Must we not exhibit the pure white of holiness? Yes, this white is the very badge of our profession. For what is our Christian profession but that we are thus washed and clean? What does St. Paul say in his Epistle to the Romans about maintaining the consistency of our Christian profession? Is it not, "How shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" And is not this as much as to say, according to the figure of the text, "How shall we, who are washed white as snow in innocence and holiness through the blood of Christ,

live in the crimson stain of sin?" It cannot be. Every one must see the folly and inconsistency. We must hold fast our profession if we would hold fast of the forgiveness of our sins through Christ. The two cannot be separated, without our being separated from Christ. Our profession represents Christ on one side as offering forgiveness, ourselves on the other as accepting it: Christ on one side as the cleanser from the dye of sin, ourselves on the other as the cleansed. How, then, can we separate them? How can we do otherwise than hold them both?

No man indeed, whose conscience reproaches him with living in a state of sin, can at the same time flatter himself that his sins have been forgiven. But many may, and many continually do, flatter themselves with the notion that their sins will be forgiven for the sake of Christ in the end. Otherwise, unless they were downright unbelievers, how could they live on in any peace or comfort? But they are not very careful to inquire about the end. They seem to go on much in the same way as careless men and spendthrifts do in the matters of the world, who turn away all serious thought of consequences by an utterly unwarrantable trust that all will turn up well in the end; how, they neither see nor know, nor much, if at all, care. But on the contrary, the prudent man makes sure of the end, by making sure of the means. And

so it is with the grand concern of all, so it surely is in the business of eternal life; only more, very much more numerous indeed, are the careless. They trust to the end, they expect salvation at last, they reckon upon it as turning up for their last chance, but will not trouble themselves to make it a certainty. They are content to let it come, but they will do nothing to bring it towards them. And thus they are enabled to live on, though hourly at the brink of destruction, with the cry of peace and safety on their lips.

But the man who is wise unto salvation, always bears in mind the means of salvation. He knows that the only sure state is that of one whose past sins have been forgiven, and that this state is that of being clothed with the pure white robe of holiness. He remembers the condition to which we are called in the joyful announcement that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin; which is, that we walk not in darkness and lie, but that we walk in the light, as Christ is the light, and do the truth. Then we have fellowship with Christ, and with one another, as sons of God; and then, and then only, the blood of Christ the Son of God cleanseth from all sin; and though our sins shall have been as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; and though they shall have been red like crimson, they will be as wool.

SERMON XXII.

THE LORD'S ADVENT.

Second Sunday in Advent.

ISAIAH XXIV. 23.

“ Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and before his ancients gloriously.”

IN keeping our faces steadily turned to the prospect of our Lord's second coming, and attending to those circumstances which Scripture mentions concerning it, what serious and solemn thoughts come into the heart! how does this life shrink into the space of a span, and the sum of its days dwindle into a moment! For example, in reading this text, where we are told of the change which shall come upon the sun and moon, and quench their glory in heaven, how fleeting appear the things of this present world! Those bright lights were set in the firmament to divide the light from darkness, and to deal forth unto us the various seasons of the year;

they regulate, therefore, all the affairs of this world. From the days of Adam until this present moment, they have seen generations after generations of men come into this world and go out of it; they have measured to them their times and seasons, and the number of the days of their life; their courses have been watched, and studied, and foretold, in order to future undertakings; in short, they seem so entirely to direct and govern our affairs, that nations have mistaken them for the Lord our Governor, who made them, and have fallen down in worship before them. Amidst all the changes of this fleeting world, they alone seem fixed and lasting. We come and we go; but the sun abideth, and the moon endureth.

But the day is coming, when even they shall be no more. We are here told, that at the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord, "the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed!" And the prophet Joel explains these words by saying, "That the sun and moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining¹." What, therefore, is there lasting in this world? What is there in it to engage the heart of an heir of light and immortality, when its very light, which sustains all life, is but for a time? What can he lay hold of, that will stay? what can he provide,

¹ Joel iii. 15.

that will not perish? He must go to the world to come for such things; and then he can neither see them, nor handle them; but to his comfort he may remember, that sight continually deceives, even touch will mislead, and he has a much surer communication with them than through the fallible senses; he draws those Divine things towards him, he brings them within reach, he holds them within his grasp, by faith, which is the "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen;" and first and foremost among the objects of faith is the advent, or coming of our Lord. It is, indeed, the first event of the world to come, from which all the rest that shall befall us will take their colour for bright or for dark, according as He shall accept us or reject us; this, then, should ever be before our eyes, the thoughts of this should ever be in our hearts; to this we should continually look forward in all our thoughts, and words, and works, asking of ourselves how they will appear on the last day, when the thoughts of every heart shall be revealed, and all shall be judged according to that which they have done, whether it be good or bad? How differently would men consider the things of this world, if they had sufficient faith to keep this prospect steadily before their eyes; if, looking back unto Christ upon his Cross, offering the sacrifice for sin, they looked forward to Christ on his seat of judgment and throne of glory, set there to pass

sentence of acquittal or condemnation upon mankind assembled before Him ! Blessed are they who so do ! They have laid hold on the things which shall never pass away, they look to a heaven which shall never be shaken by fall of sun, or moon, or stars.

The powers of this world are to be shaken ; its day is appointed, it shall perish ; but the servants of Christ shall live ; they shall leave the dust and off-scourings of their body in it, to perish together with it, but the pure and essential part, conformed to the image of Christ in his glorious body, shall rise far above it, and ascend into heavenly places, there to abide for ever ! Why then will any one die, as he must, if he shall have laid up his all in this dying world ? Why will men often barter the everlasting and glorious inheritance of the world to come for a few acres of dust, a few houses of perishing stone, a few pieces of perishing gold ? Because they will not believe, they will not consider. They give up all their mind to the vain shadows of this fleeting world around them ; like children, they are pleased with its idle play, and so think not of the solid substance and serious reality of the world to come. Day after day passes away, and day after day brings some change, and should convince them that they are living in a world of change, and therefore of no long continuance : but the day is enough for them ; they think not of to-morrow !

But let men cheat themselves as they will, nothing can delay the coming of the day of the Lord; and the sun in his course by day, and the moon in her path by night, are but by so much hastening on the road of their own destruction. O what anxiety is there among the children of men, when the day of the arrival of a monarch among them is expected; what careful preparations are made to give a suitable welcome; what thought and invention are set to work to show forth their loyalty to the best advantage; how is their heart set upon the occasion, and their mouths loud and frequent upon it! No other work can be done, nothing else is thought of, nothing else is talked of; and yet in what a poor fleeting pageant it all ends! In a day, perhaps in an hour, perhaps in a few minutes, all is over, and numbered with the sights of ages ago. The object of their admiration is come and gone, and the sight of so much preparation, which has now become superfluous and unmeaning, and is merely so much rubbish to be removed and hidden out of sight as quickly as possible, fills the mind of the reflecting spectator with melancholy thoughts upon the vanity of all the work of this world, if it move not also his heart with satirical reflections, which coming from nature will not be suppressed, on the littleness of the utmost of human greatness.

But a King is coming amongst us, a mighty

King, a King of majesty and great glory, the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, the Lord of lords. He is at hand; his forthcoming arrival hath been announced! O ye busy preparers of the way of an earthly king, will ye make no preparation for this heavenly King? Where are your tokens of reception? where is the rehearsal of your songs of gratulation and triumph? Is it possible that He should never be talked about, never be thought about? And yet your preparations for his coming can never prove vain and unmeaning. He does not come and go like a shadow; his day, once come, is for ever and ever; and his entertainers, once acknowledged by Him, have to entertain Him with an everlasting pomp of reception. Their holiday garment is always to continue, their hymn of "Welcome, welcome, mighty King!" is to sound through eternity. Where, then, are your preparations? how is it that your mind is unmoved, your hands idle, your voices silent? Do you not like the news of his coming? Alas! there is the secret. He brings his reward with Him, and therefore the prisoners would as soon think of welcoming their judge into the town, as most men of preparing to hail the arrival of the King of Glory. Judgment carries the sword before Him; punishment exhibits her whips and chains behind Him. But here lies to us the proof of what we really are, whether criminals expecting Him in terror as our Judge,

and therefore as much as possible putting his coming out of mind, or, as his people, expecting his return after a long absence, and with the joyful assurance that He will never be separated from them again. If we do not like to think of his coming, if we always hear the announcement of it with unwilling ears, and with such a wish to disbelieve it as studiously to put it out of mind again as soon as possible, if we keep it among the terrible secrets of our hearts, which we are afraid to tell out, even to ourselves, of which the very mention mars all the joy around us, and silences the noise of our viols, what are we then but conscience-stricken culprits, afraid to meet their Judge? But if we make joyful preparation, if we give up body, soul, and mind to it, exercising the body in works of holiness, practising the mind in thoughts of innocence and righteousness, educating the soul in pure affections, teaching our hearts the lesson of his mercies, and our tongues the corresponding song of his praise; and if we look to his day as the end of all our doings, surely then we are his faithful subjects and servants, well prepared to give Him due welcome, and such as He will bid to follow in his train, as He moves in bright royal procession to his everlasting house, whose gates have lifted up their heads to receive Him and his people. Such are they of whom the Apostle speaks in that remarkable passage of his Epistle to Titus (ii. 11—13),

“ For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, rightcously, and godly in this present world ; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

The words of the prophecy in the text, after mentioning the signs of his coming in the confusion of the moon and shame of the sun, goes on to announce his kingdom : “ The Lord of hosts,” it says, “ shall reign in mount Zion, and before his ancients gloriously.” Not that He does not reign at this moment, and has done from all eternity,—all things are under his rule and governance,—but at present his reign is not acknowledged in this world. Is it not rather decidedly rejected by the majority of mankind ? Are not his commandments broken, his promises despised, his messages rejected ? Is there not the prince of this world set up in opposition to Him ? And do not the lives of men, if not their very voices, cry out, “ Let us break his bonds asunder, and cast away his cords from us ?” Do they not say in their hearts, if not with their lips, “ We will not have this man for our King, to rule over us ?” And who are joining in this cry ? Have we ourselves a voice or even whisper in it ? Are we clear of the charge of rebellion ? Have we kept all his statutes, nor broken one of his commandments ?

What can be said, but "No?" Therefore the more eager must we be to redeem the time; the more earnest to carry forward a due preparation of ourselves for his coming; the more studious to fill from the pure well of his word, and the rich fountain of his recorded mercies, our memories with the thoughts of his goodness, and our hearts with thankfulness; the more watchful to lose none of his opportunities of service, and to put to full account his means of grace, considering that "the night is far spent, the day is at hand."

And what a day will that be! how surpassing its brightness! how inexhaustible its fulness of joy! Then the Lord shall begin his reign indeed, acknowledged and felt, and implicitly obeyed, through all the realms of creation. The good shall rejoice in the perfection of their service, which there shall then be no sin to obstruct. They shall feel themselves at liberty to serve and worship their everlasting King to the fullest extent of his commandments, and shall be filled with unspeakable joy at the consciousness of such capability, after which, during all their lifetime here, they were aspiring with hard and unceasing struggle. But the wicked shall be forced to obedience, under the constraint of chains and darkness; and, to crown all, the great enemies of all, the grand fomenters of all rebellion and workers of all disorder, sin and death shall be put under his feet! Thus

gloriously shall commence the reign of the Lord Christ, the Son of God, in the city of his heavenly Zion, in the presence of his angels and saints, his ancients, who shall stand before Him in continual service of joyful praise and thanksgiving; and of his kingdom there shall be no end!

SERMON XXIII.

COMMITTING OURSELVES TO GOD.

PSALM xxxi. 5.

“ Into thine hand I commit my spirit : thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.”

THESE words come down to us with great authority. They were first of all uttered by David, who in so many things was a type of the Redeemer to come. In them he expressed his entire confidence in the Lord, and so in his troubles and perils put himself unreservedly into his hands,—his life, his soul, his body, his spirit, the last of which he especially mentions as being the most excellent part of man. Thus he made the Lord his keeper, with sure trust in Him, because He had redeemed and delivered him several times before, and because he had found the Lord a God of truth, whose promises had never failed him ; therefore he finds them now his great comfort and support. And next, they

were uttered, at least the first half of them, by the Redeemer Himself, when He had finished the work appointed Him by the Father, and having said them, crying with a loud voice, He gave up the ghost. Thus they come to us with a very deep meaning indeed; and we have to apply them, not only as David, in all time of our tribulation, but also as our Saviour, in the hour of death. And they have been, and are continually so applied as the most suitable words, both in themselves and on account of what they refer us to, in which we can resign ourselves to the care and protection of the Lord.

But have all that have used them felt their meaning, and so made them the prayer of the heart and not of the lips only? The words presume that the person who uses them has his heart full of the experience of the power of the Lord's redemption, and strong in faith from having received cheering earnestness of his promises. And is this so common a person? When ~~do~~ too many men first commend their spirits into the hands of the Lord? Is it not when they find that their spirits are quitting their bodies, and that in fact they can keep them no longer from the Lord to themselves in disobedience? Then indeed they get themselves to Him right humbly. Since they must go out of this world, they prefer of course going to the Lord in heaven, rather than to his adversary in the pit. But it is after all a desperate venture.

They know nothing of the Lord, and they deal with Him as they do with a man whom they cannot help trusting. As long as they can help it, will they trust money or any other treasure to a man whose character they do not know, with whom they have no acquaintance? But when they are in great danger, and they can find nobody else, then they will do it, because they cannot help themselves, and then they will be glad to believe that he is an honest man, and not a robber or murderer; and for the sake of their own peace they will persuade themselves that they are in good and trustworthy hands. Do not too many men deal with God much after this fashion? What do they know of the Lord? Have they diligently made his acquaintance? have they given Him entertainment in the dwelling-place of their hearts? have they been entertained by Him in his house with spiritual meat and drink, and liked it so well as never to refuse his invitation? Have they conversed with Him through prayer? have they obtained all the information they can about Him, reading his Word, using his means, seeking his will, doing his commandments? Not they: and therefore they have never trusted Him as long as they could help it. They have trusted what they knew much better. They have trusted the world, though it is passing away; they have trusted man, though his breath is in his nostrils, and his heart is deceitful above all things; yea,

and they have trusted Satan, though he is the father of lies, and was a murderer from the beginning. These they have trusted with all their treasure: into the hands of these they have committed their lives and fortunes. But let the dark hour of death come, when the world must be parted with, when they must take leave of man, when Satan only mocks at them, then how readily will they trust themselves to this utter stranger, the Lord! Then how glad are they to believe that He is merciful and gracious, though they have shut their eyes to his mercy and grace all their lives long! Then, for the sake of their own peace, they persuade themselves that He is all love, and nothing else, and are wilfully ignorant that He is a God of justice, a punisher of sin, a consuming fire to his enemies. Then, for the sake of their own peace, they put all their confidence in Him in whom they had never any confidence before, as if the unchangeable One had all at once changed, and, indeed, redeemed his character, and they, wretched creatures of change, had not changed their situation, and had no occasion to redeem theirs. Alas! is not this too frequently the spirit in which men utter with their dying lips, "Lord, into thine hand I commit my spirit?" They have neither seen Him nor known Him.

Having seen thus the false security with which too many pronounce these awful words, let us turn to the well-founded hope, the well-assured

confidence, with which the child of God utters them.

To him God is no stranger: the following words in the text declare his intimate knowledge of Him: "Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." What a depth of experience is there in these words! what a close acquaintance with his ways is manifested in them! what habitual conversation with Him is declared in them! Let us consider them awhile.

(1) First, then, the child of God testifies to the power of the Lord's redemption; he has felt it, and he acknowledges it as the stay of his hope and trust. He has had many earnestings of the redemption in Jesus Christ at the last day, and the memory of them now assures him. He has been raised from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; he has been delivered from perilous temptations; he has been brought out of darkness and error; he has been released from the captivity of sinful habits, whether of self-indulgence in omitting duties, or of self-gratification in committing transgressions. And all this is present to his mind in his daily practice, so that redemption is in his continual thoughts. He sees its blessed course going on daily in his own heart, advancing from the earnest to the fulness by its various stages. He has even perhaps in the body, in some recovery from dangerous sickness, in some deliverance

from perilous accident, had an earnest of the redemption of the body. Thus he knows that his Redeemer liveth; for he feels his life in Him, working in Him to the strength of his faith, the brightness of his hope, the exercise of spiritual grace. Not only at the hour of death, but at any hour of his life he can say, "Thou hast redeemed me;" for as the mercy is continually felt, the thanks are continually ready. Is not the Lord known indeed to such an one? is not all his character for mercy, for justice, for goodness, for truth, before him? are not all his mighty means of help and deliverance displayed to him? Yes, such an one, and such an one only, can say, with the full knowledge of the meaning of what he says, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit."

(2) And, in the second place, the child of God testifies to his faithfulness in executing his promises: "O Lord God of truth" is his cry. But how could he have said this, if his daily experience had not told him so? Both the understanding of the promises of God, and the fulfilment of them, grow through life; the understanding in clearness, the fulfilment in richness. The Lord has promised the victory over the world, and the believer in Him finds himself more and more victorious over its power every day. The Lord has promised help against temptation, and the believer finds himself stronger against it every day. The Lord has promised the "peace

which passeth all understanding," and the believer finds it settled more deeply in his heart and conscience every day. The Lord has promised everlasting life, and the believer feels the earnest of that life more stirring in him every day, through a faster hold of faith in Christ, through a closer communion in his Spirit of holiness, through a more active stewardship of his gifts, through a more abiding sense of his presence, through a more ready foregoing of the things which are seen, and a more steady looking upon the things which are unseen. Thus the Lord is found to be a God of truth indeed, to be the very truth, without whom nothing can be true, but must be false, as coming from the father of lies.

Now see how the child of God can pronounce that awful farewell to this transitory world, and joyful salutation of the King of the world to come, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth:" with what unreservedness, with what emptying of the heart of all its earthly longings, with what fast and confident hold of resignation and outpouring of a ready will, with what blessed conformity to the example of his dying Master!

And having also now considered the two very different ways in which these words may be pronounced and are pronounced, shall any of us doubt as to which of the two classes they would belong? None of course do, when they come

to consider. But there lies the grand question. Do they consider? If they did at all generally, should we not see a very different state of things in the world? Could men, having the awful hour before them in which they have to surrender themselves, whether willing or unwilling, into the hands of their Judge, for everlasting life or everlasting death, walk in that carelessness about their manner of life, and that forgetfulness of the Lord, in which they do? Could they show so little interest in a Redeemer, so little thanks for his cross and passion, so little apprehension of the power of his resurrection, so little admiration of that glory in which He sits at the right hand of God, and in which He sat with Him before the world began, and which for a time He laid aside that He might endure the cross and the grave for men, and in which He will come again? Surely they could not. And therefore let none be their followers, lest following them in the carelessness of their life, they may follow them in the vain confidence of their death, when they presume to utter the words, "Into thy hand I commit my spirit;" or in the more just despair, which will not allow them to pronounce them at all.

O may we die the death of the righteous, the great example of which was given by the Saviour Himself, when He uttered these as his dying words. May we prepare for it by dying daily to the sin of this world, by accustoming our-

selves to say, with a sincere heart, and unfeigned faith, and good conscience, "Thy will be done." If we be not striving to do that will, then most assuredly we shall have to suffer under it, when our part in it is over, and nothing remains but for God to execute it according to the eternal laws of his justice. If it be better to fall into the hands of God than of man, is it not worst of all to fall into the hands of his everlasting enemy? Let us, then, look forward to the hour which will call upon us to pronounce these words; let us even consider how we could pronounce them the very next hour, and let us never cease to lay fast hold of our profession of our great High Priest, who pronounced them as He finished for us the sacrifice of the cross!

SERMON XXIV.

THE CONDITION OF THE PRESENT LIFE.

MATT. XXV. 4.

“Then shall he say to them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

IN the very midst of his judgments the Lord remembereth mercy, nor in the hour of his fiercest wrath does He forget his loving-kindness; and even when He shall bring on the utter, unbroken, everlasting darkness of the eternal prison-house, pronouncing the last irreversible sentence on the wicked, the brightness of his mercy shall still be visible, and its voice shall be heard even amid the appalling sound of condemnation. Yes, these awful words, with all their fulness of terror, contain in them a cause for exceeding comfort, for most thankful acknowledgment; for do we not gather from them that the fire of God's judgment is not purposely

kindled for man ? With all his rebelliousness he does not necessarily fall into it ; it has been prepared for others, for the devil and his angels, not for him. It is not God's will that he should perish, but have everlasting life : and the life which we are now living has, in his gracious mercy, been granted to man that he may yet attain unto salvation from the punishment of his sins.

The devil and his angels sinned and lost their first estate of innocence and glory, not only of their own free will, but also of their clear knowledge ; their sin lay entirely in themselves, was the unborrowed invention of their own hearts ; they were not tempted out of their first estate, they were not led astray from their heavenly habitation ; they of their own designed purpose kept not the one, and forsook the other ; and therefore they found no place for repentance. And from the moment of their rebellion, the everlasting fire was prepared for them, and they have been reserved in " chains of darkness unto the judgment of the last great day, when they will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone ¹."

But man's sin came out of the persuasion of others, even these wicked spirits ; he was deceived by their superior knowledge, he was persuaded by their cunning deceit, his very inno-

¹ 2 Pet. ii. 4. Jude 6.

cence exposed him to it. He had no thought of sinning before it was put into his heart from without by another. He did not throw up his first estate, he was seduced out of it ; he did not leave his appointed habitation, he was expelled from Paradise in consequence of his sin. God therefore dealt otherwise with him ; He gave him room for repentance ; and instead of lighting for him the fire of judgment, prepared from that moment the means of his salvation ; instead of keeping him in chains under darkness without hope of forgiveness, He has continued to him his native light ; not only allows, but demands his free and upward look to heaven, and has bidden him lay fast hold of the blessed hope of the forgiveness of sin, and everlasting life to come, in Jesus Christ our Lord. But if a man shall make no use of this reprieve, if he will not put to account the means of recovering his first estate, if he shall neglect so great salvation, then he will be guilty of the wilful sin of the devil and his angels. His first estate was put into his hands again, if he chose to keep it ; but he did not choose. More than Paradise, heaven itself, was offered him for an habitation, yea, an eternal habitation, and he would not enter in. Partner therefore in the same sin, he will be partner in the same judgment ; and on the great day he will be addressed by the Almighty Judge, in the words of the final sentence, “ Depart from me,

ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

And now what shall we think of this life? Is it the pastime that so many seem to make of it? Is it the enjoyment which an heir has of a splendid property, who thinks that he has nothing to do but to spend it to his own pleasure and amusement? On the contrary, are we not on our trial, our last trial, throughout it? Is it not the opportunity allowed us of regaining our lost estate, by all diligence of work? Is it not the stewardship of gracious means, which we must faithfully put to account? Is it not the reprieve from execution, during which we must strive to obtain our pardon? How clearly now do we see the force of those admonitions of the Apostle of Jesus Christ, that "now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation²;" that "we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling³!" Now is no season for the pleasures of sin, but the allotted time for undoing the work of sin, in doing the work of the Lord; and if we be about his work, which is indeed the work of our own salvation, then we have renounced our former service of sin, we have accepted the service of the Lord; to Him we live, and not to ourselves.

We are enjoying a season which never can

² 2 Cor. vi. 2.

³ Phil. ii. 12.

return, means which never can be renewed. How eagerly do men watch the worldly opportunities of this brief season ! See how greedily are seized the occasions of a day's frost, of a day's rain, yea, of an hour's sunshine ! Men know well enough that they cannot recall them. O that they would use as much common sense in the husbandry of the Lord's work ! Now the sun of righteousness is shining for us ; now his promises are bright in earnest ; now the joy of believing can be had ; now the hope of salvation can be entertained ; now the sprinkling of the blood of Christ can avail ; now the Holy Spirit can wash and sanctify ; now prayer can go up to heaven in the name of Christ ; now the great agents of our salvation are at work, the Holy Spirit interceding in the heart of man, the Son of God interceding at the throne of heaven. But their ministration is but for a season. Shall such an occasion be lost ?

Can anything be more awful than the consideration of the true condition of this our mortal life ? It is indeed the last hour to us all, as well as the first. If we were nowhere before it, we shall be somewhere after it ; and all depends upon the manner in which we spend it, as to where that somewhere will be. Can there be a greater proof of the sad fall of our nature than the absolute madness which prevails, of giving up this short allowance of time, this fleeting opportunity, to anything else but its proper pur-

pose ; and that God and his precious means of grace should be thrust into a corner as if in the way of our work, into a dark corner, where they are to be handled only when we have settled everything else in its place, or to be stumbled against with an unwilling or forgetful foot ? When are men so ready both to make and to take excuses for themselves, as when the work of God is to be done ? Let rain fall in floods, let sickness disable hands, let death itself be busy in their houses, men's markets shall nevertheless be full ; but let showers intervene, let slight colds be prevalent, and God's houses shall be nearly empty. Who could imagine from the sight of this world, that anything so serious, so occupying the whole attention of man, as the work of salvation was going on ? Look at the country, you see at a glance what is the nature of its tillage ! Look at the town, you see immediately the nature of its manufacture ! But where do you see the public tokens of the great work of all, in town or country ?

We are stewards, who have once broken our trust, but are still, through our Lord's long-suffering, retained on trial. We are criminals, who have had sentence of death passed upon them, but are allowed the means of obtaining pardon before the final sentence be executed. We are workmen, who having done what we should not have done, are indulged with the opportunity of redeeming the time in undoing

what we have done, and doing what we should do. Is not, then, our lifetime a precious time indeed? Is not every day and hour precious, especially when we cannot tell whether so much as a day or an hour lies between our employment and our account? What is needed to move us? Is precept? The word of God is urging us to the work in every page. Is example wanting? There are the angels lost for ever. Are means deficient? There is Christ the Son of God for our righteousness, there is the Holy Spirit for our sanctification. Is encouragement wanting to sustain us? There are promises which have already started on their course of fulfilment, as surely as the Lord that will come again has come once already. Are threats wanting to rouse us? There is a penalty which has already started on its course of fulfilment, as surely as the sentence in my text has had its forerunner in the sentence, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Are calls and warnings needed? There are sicknesses in ourselves, deaths in others; the near things which we would willingly have kept, gone before we thought of them, and things which we wished afar off, come before we were aware. Who could suppose, in looking at the general appearance of mankind, that life was such a thing as this?

Yet, such it is. We may forget who we are, and whose we are, what we have been, and what

we are to be ; but the day that cometh will only be the more sudden thief in the more sleepy night, for all that. Shall we not bear in mind that a punishment delayed in hopes of amendment, is justly more severe than that which would immediately have followed the offence ? That offence may have been committed in much ignorance, under strong temptation ; but the want of amendment, especially when all possible means as well as time have been allowed for it, is a wilful, thankless rebellion.

And having seen the bright side of this text, as to the everlasting fire not having been purposely prepared for man, let us also, in justice to ourselves, turn to the dark part of it. Is it not a tremendous consideration that this penalty comes upon man, not as intended for him, but as one to which he has exposed himself, through partnership with those for whom it was meant ? How terrible then must it be ! how far exceeding any thing which any suffering of this world can lead us to imagine ! For every such suffering, however severe, is natural ; to us it is part of our own proper and peculiar penalty, death, which has become natural to us. It is no more than we reasonably expect and make up our minds for, as dwellers in sinful flesh. We can always conceive something worse than the worst that befalls us, and can thank God that He spares us. Besides, we have abundant means of patience and comfort ; and the trust in the Lord

God Almighty, and the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, make us strong and of good courage, give us the victory against the severest handling of the world and the flesh; and the groan of pain is overcome by the prayer of faith, and the sigh of affliction by the song of thanksgiving. And at the worst we know that there must be an end, and, if we bear the trial, a joyful end. All our pain and sorrow we then consider but as the remnant of the corruption of our nature, not as the foretaste of punishment. But the sufferings of the world to come, into which the wicked will be drawn from having kept company with them for whom they have been specially prepared, are so far from natural to us, that we cannot conceive them, we can have no notion of them from any suffering here. And as the cup of God's wrath will be full, the wicked in his torment will suffer to the very utmost that he can conceive, and all without hope of deliverance. God will be far off, nothing will be present of Him but his everlasting curse.

And now, again, let us ask, what is life? Is it only a passage through this world, as if we were travelling at ease by comfortable stages, through a pleasant country, in agreeable company? Or, is it a struggle through a desperate fight? a run for life from a destructive fire? a work to repair an inestimable loss? a respite from execution to be improved with all diligence into the obtaining pardon? a state of daily

responsibility for that which the Son of God hath done for us, who hath laid down his life for our sakes, and purchased for us all the means of salvation, that we may be justified, be sanctified, be glorified? O what a present is around us, what a future is before us, and what a past will shortly be behind us, to account for at the judgment-seat of Christ, who, on the great day, when He shall divide mankind into two flocks according to their conduct in this life, shall receive the good with a welcome of blessing into glory, and dismiss the wicked with a curse into punishment! Can we sit still with such a prospect? Let all rise and follow Him who leadeth into his glory.

SERMON XXV.

BELIEF AND UNBELIEF.

MARK ix. 24.

“ And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief.”

DOES not this poor father seem to contradict himself in saying that he believed, and yet had unbelief in him, for which he asked the Lord's help? Are we to suppose that he was so confused with his sorrow, that when he said these words with tears he spoke at random? Never was a man more in his senses: never did man pronounce so strict a truth. His sorrow had not dulled his faculties, it had quickened them; for it was in part a godly sorrow, not only a natural. It arose not only from the sight of the fit which took his poor child, but also from the reproof which Jesus had given him in those words, “ O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you, how long shall I suffer you !” and

again in those words, "If thou *canst* believe," to which these of the text are the direct answer. It is an answer which agrees most exactly with the experience of every son of Adam, who hath believed in his heart that God hath raised Jesus from the dead. For what is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it only to believe of Him that He was crucified, dead, and buried, went up into heaven, and thence shall come again at the last day? No: belief *of* Him is no belief at all that will avail us: it is not faith. Belief *in* Him is the thing required from us to save us; this alone is faith. To believe in Him crucified, is to have our sin ever before us, so that we may also have our forgiveness ever before us, and to crucify the old man within us with his affections and lusts. To believe in Him dead, is to count ourselves as having been dead in sin, but now to be dead unto sin. To believe in Him risen from the dead, is to reckon ourselves as risen with Him unto righteousness, so that we should live unto Him, and walk with Him, waiting in all faith the resurrection of the just at the last day. To believe in Him ascended into heaven, is to lift up our hearts and place our affections there, that where He is, there we may be also. It is to see Him there as our High-Priest continually pleading for us, and to exercise his intercession with instant prayer in his name. It is to see Him there as the King of his kingdom of heaven, as the

Bishop and Shepherd of our souls, as the head of his body the Church, and so to take all that befalls us as coming from his hands, and working for our good, however evil at first sight it may look, and to cry under all circumstances, "Thy will be done." It is to ascribe unto Him that presence with which He dwells every where at every time, and sees and knows every heart, and to live as under his continual eye as it is watching the very thoughts of our heart, knowing that it is all open unto Him. It is to walk with Him as did Enoch and Noah, and to have Him dwelling in us, and walking in us; as having him for our God, and being his people. And to believe in Him coming again at the last day, is to prepare for it by a faithful stewardship of all that which He hath committed to us, and to work under Him in all joyfulness, knowing that our hope in Him shall never make us ashamed, but that, if found faithful, we shall receive from Him on that day the crown of glory which fadeth not away. And it is to live every day as if the Lord were coming every day, to judge ourselves every day as if we were to be judged before Him every day, to rejoice in Him every day as though He were come in his glory every day.

Such is the working of a belief in Him. Is it any thing less than an entire surrender of our hearts to Him, in all their thoughts, and desires, and hopes? Is it anything less than an utter abandonment of the world, and the flesh, and

the devil, for his service? Is it any thing less than seeing his hand present on every occasion, so as to live upon Him, and to live with Him, and to live for Him; to live, in short, the life of the just that liveth by faith?

Now all that is not of belief must of course be of unbelief, though not of disbelief. How much, then, of unbelief must there be, even in the hearts of striving Christians? for the struggle is to bring the heart under the law of Christ, and every thought that hath not been brought under that law is part and parcel of unbelief. When, therefore, with an eye cleared by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, with a judgment searching as he expects to be searched at the last day, with a jealousy for the Lord's honour and glory that will not stand still to see Him robbed of one single item of his property,—and the least thought in his own heart is his property; when thus the faithful follower of Christ comes to look over at night the account of the day, may he not well cry in tears of repentance and confession and say, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief?” that is, I do indeed believe with the spirit; but the flesh is weak. My spirit sees Thee; but my flesh sees the world, and would fain lean upon the world. All is not yet subdued unto Thee within me. There still abide things of unbelief within me. O impute not unbelief unto me! Thou that purgest every fruit-bearing branch of thy vine, that it may bring forth more

fruit, prune away that which still hindereth perfection, and help me with thy grace day after day to drive more and more the unbelief of flesh and blood clean out of my heart ! Help me against this unbelief, O Lord, and help me notwithstanding this unbelief, O Lord !

Must we not acknowledge, then, that the cry in tears of this man, saying, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief," was indeed the cry of faith, the cry of a man that knows his own weakness, and understands the Lord's strength, and that it must be the cry of every one that is fighting a good fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh, and gaining every day a victory of faith through Jesus Christ, who hath overcome the world ?

If this, then, be our proper cry until we can cry out, "Victory over every enemy," it is plain that it must be our cry to the end of life ; for surely the fight is unto the end. If Christ purge unto the end, we must come short of fruit unto the end. Even supposing that at the end of the day we could say, without faltering, and as before the presence of the Lord, our conscience bearing us witness in the Holy Ghost, that we had gained a complete victory, yet we know not what fresh enemy, and the stronger for being fresh, we may have to deal with to-morrow. Many a man, before now, in things of the world to come, no less than in things of this world, has thought that all was done, when all had but just seriously

begun. It is the fault of all young soldiers to think the battle over, just at the moment when the old soldier sees that its real crisis has just begun: nor is it otherwise in Christian warfare.

You see, then, how deep wisdom, how close consistency there is in these words, which at first sight may seem foolish and contradictory, the utterance of a heart stupified with grief. We shall see this more clearly still when we come to consider what is the belief, and what the unbelief, which too commonly prevail.

The belief is too often a mere assent, and even that not of the understanding, to those things which men have been taught. Much of the enjoyment of life is found to depend upon agreeing to what is around us, and therefore men agree to the Christian faith among the rest. It would require, in fact, some effort to disagree in a country where the Bible continually falls in the way, where one day in seven is kept holy, where the laws suppose every man a Christian, and where a man can scarcely stir out of doors without seeing a church tower. Such belief may, indeed, lead onward to faith, but it is no more faith than any road that happens to lead to a place is the place. And how many are content to stay upon the road and never see the place at all! If they indeed believed, they would act accordingly. How does the man act who believes (as we all naturally

do) that he will live for some time to come? Does he not make provision for that time? Does he not lay up many treasures of hope in that time? And when you believe (as all do) that the sun will rise to-morrow, do you not make preparation for the morrow, and often divide the time of the morrow with as much certainty, as if it had already come? Is not this leaning on the time to come, depending upon the sun? Do you lean upon Christ, the giver of all time, yea, of eternity, with the same reliance? Do you depend upon Christ, whose is the sun, and the heavens in which he moves, and the earth on which he shines, with the same confidence? And since the Lord alone is the object on which faith should lean and depend, which is now your Lord, Christ or the world? Only compare the manner in which you treat them both. Which do you trust most to, the prayer of faith in Christ, or the visible means of the world, which are under your own power or that of your friends? And whose approval are you most seeking, Christ's, which you cannot, indeed, now publicly hear, but which will be ratified at the last day in the presence of men and angels, or the world's, which you may indeed hear in loud applause, but which will avail you nothing, and may even be an item in the account against you at the last day? Who is dead within you, the world or Christ? Who is alive within you, Christ or

the world? To whom have you been crucified, to the world or to Christ? To what place do you ascend in the hopes or dreams of enjoyment in your heart? to heavenly places, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God, or to earthly places, where is set up on high some prize of this fleeting world?

The answer to these questions determines between belief and unbelief. But men are not ready to put them; for they are slow to convict themselves of unbelief. Do you not find that men are often most unwilling to part with that which they have least right to? So it is with the claim of true Christian belief. They will not use it by making it good; they hardly know or care whether they have it or not. But in the moment that their right is questioned, all their jealousy is up. They stand out for it against all opposition, and when that is gone by, often attend to it less than ever out of a spirit of defiance. Alas! that men should thus maintain an empty claim to a spiritual grace.

Sometimes, however, a man is awakened to the sense of the value of that which he cared not about, by having his right ownership of it questioned. So may it be with any of you that might have been too regardless of that which has been committed to you in the Church of God, and have not established your claim to it by an open and diligent exercise of it.

But if so weak be too often the title to belief,

how strong, alas ! is the title to unbelief ! At the end of this day think of what you have thought, said, and done, as a member of Christ, and as a member of the society of the world : compare the moments of utter surrender of all present and to come into his hands, in the practice of the prayer, “ Thy will be done,” with those of the scheming, the dreaming, the fretting, and rejoicing about the things of this world, whether of the two classes is the more numerous and strong. It is by these little daily occurrences that we are tested and proved ; for if we will not trust our bodies which we do see unto Christ as their keeper, how much less shall we commit our souls and spirits, which we do not see, to his care as the Bishop and Shepherd of our souls ! The more we examine ourselves, so much the more we find out our short-comings ; and therefore the more we believe, so much the more we become convinced of our remaining unbelief ; while he that believes not will not be convinced of his unbelief, though he have nothing else in him. Therefore may we have grace to cry daily, from a daily fuller conviction of our infirmity, with tears of sorrow for so much deficiency, with tears of joy for so much light of self-knowledge, “ Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief.”

SERMON XXVI.

VIOLENCE IN ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

MATT. xi. 12.

“ And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.”

THESE are words which put our Christian profession before us in all its seriousness. They tell us, that it is a real and earnest struggle, yes, a violent struggle. No lukewarmness, no indifference can gain the kingdom of heaven. In this one point it is like to a kingdom of earth, which must be taken by violence by all that are not born heirs to it, if they would be kings. But neither are any of us, or of all mankind, born heirs to the kingdom of heaven. On the contrary, we are born in sin. But into that kingdom can enter nothing “ that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or

maketh a lie ¹." What then remains but for us to take it by force, like usurpers, and so to wear the crown of life, being "made priests and kings unto God the Father ²" through Jesus Christ our Lord ?

Such has our profession been from the very moment that John the Baptist made the first proclamation of the Gospel in the words, "Repent ye : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand ³." Did not the very King of that kingdom lead the way into it by violence ? Did Jesus Christ go up into heaven, and take his seat upon the royal throne of his glory, without openly showing us an example of that struggle of violence by which it must be taken ? To sum up all in one deed, did He not suffer death upon the cross, and thus do violence to all the powers of this world ? Was not that an act of violence indeed which nailed his precious body to the cross, and poured his precious blood upon the ground, (to speak indeed better things than that of Abel,) and put the just in the place of the unjust, and destroyed the works of the devil, and opened the doors of his prison-house for captive man, and reconciled the rebel to God ? From that very cross He has bequeathed to us a struggle of violence, a struggle like his, that does violence to our human nature in crucifying its corrupt affections, and mortifying its unruly members ;

¹ Rev. xxi. 27.

² Rev. i. 6.

³ Matt. iii. 2.

that does violence to the powers of this world by resisting their temptations ; that does violence to the powers of darkness and hell, by warring a good warfare against them in the armour of light, with the shield of faith and sword of the Spirit. All these enemies lie between us and the kingdom of heaven. We must force our way through them. God will allow of no other way. He says, " My dear and only-begotten Son has indeed opened the kingdom of heaven to you. But shall I admit you to enter more easily than He did ? Shall the servant be above his master ? No ; you must enter into it as into a city which is defended against you by an army. You must strive, you must watch, you must fight, you must endure hardness. Thus my kingdom must suffer violence from you, as from a soldier storming a town. None but the violent can take it ; for it must be taken by force."

Such, my dear brethren, is our profession according to the text. How different from the notion which men commonly take of it ! They think that they may take their ease and their time ; that if they are to use any violence at all, they shall be quite strong enough for it when they are at the point to die. They do not consider that where a thing is to be taken by violence, the longer the season is delayed the greater must be the violence, if indeed the time will allow of violence at all ; because then the

enemy has had time to prepare, and is on the watch at every point of attack. And have we not enemies? I have as yet but slightly mentioned them; let me now come to a description of them.

The first enemy, then, that stands against us, blocking up the way to the kingdom of heaven, is the world. It is indeed most jealous of its rights. The world would not have us think of the world to come: it would not have us lifting up our hearts to the King of heaven, to the Lord on the throne of his glory, to the High-Priest who ever liveth to make intercession for us; it would not have us laying up treasures there, setting any of our affections there. How should it, when it is in every thing the contrary to the world to come? It is fleeting; and the world to come is everlasting. It is full of sin and misery; and the world to come is full of holiness and happiness. It abounds with the works of the devil; and the world to come is full of no work but that of the glory of God. Its counsels come from the wicked one, and are carried into effect by wicked men. The world to come is under no counsels but the wisdom of God, and all is done according to his truth. The world is full of murder, blasphemy, fraud, and rapine; it has crucified the Lord of glory, it has persecuted his saints, it has reviled his glorious name, it has made a lie of his truth, and folly of his wisdom. It has endeavoured to rob Him of his glory,

and still endeavours with all its might to take from Him every son that He would bring unto glory. It is dead in trespasses and sin ; it is in the darkness of the shadow of death ; it is full of antichrists. It is surely needless to describe the world to come in contrast with these points.

Such is one of our enemies, that blocks up our way to the kingdom of heaven : and is he not a powerful enemy, a violent enemy, and therefore must he not be dealt with violently ? But men can be so mad as to try to make a friend of him ; they can be so unwise as to lay up their treasures with him, and put all their hope and trust in him ; and this when they can scarcely pass a day without seeing some glaring example of his faithlessness : how he deserts his friends, cheats them in all their hopes of him, and robs them of all their treasures, and then lets them pass to the next world without any suitable preparation. For they trusted him, and he has robbed them of all, even of the inheritance of the world to come.

We vowed in our baptism manfully to fight against this world ; and the business of our life is now to pay this vow unto the Lord. We must push our way against him. We must return his violence with the violence of resistance ; and we must not be faint-hearted in the struggle, but of good cheer, knowing that Christ hath overcome the world, and bequeathed

his victory to all that fight under Him as the Captain of their salvation. So much for this enemy.

The next is one more mighty still, because he is always at hand, and that is the flesh: "The flesh cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven⁴." What wonder, therefore, that he should be an enemy to it, and desire to prevent our having any communication with it? What wonder if, being himself shut out, he should wish to shut us out together with him? He would have us entirely forget God; he would have us crucify Christ afresh by unbridled desires; he would have us eat and drink to-day, and die eternally together with him to-morrow. Being but of this life and of this world, he does not like to serve as the tabernacle of a living spirit, and the temple of a sanctified heart; he lusteth against the spirit, continually endeavours to cast it out, if he cannot enthrall it, and as long as his time lasts, he makes a violent struggle to get the dominion, and bring the soul and the spirit down together with him into the pit of corruption; and the more he has his way the more violent he is, for he is a madman without reason and without thought; and do you not see all that allow themselves to be led by him are madmen also? Though disgrace, poverty, death, stare them in the face, as the sure

⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 50.

and immediate penalty of their sensual excesses, they will not give them up; he is most determined in resistance to the Holy Spirit; he is in rebellion against the Lord and his Anointed, saying, "Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us." Is not here a violent enemy? Will he not effectually block up the way to the kingdom of heaven? Have we not sworn to fight against him? and have we not been warned that they "that are in the flesh cannot please God⁵?" and have we not been expressly told, "that they which are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts⁶?" And can the crucifying the flesh be any other than a struggle of violence with it? How then can the man who is serious in his profession of Christ crucified, live in easy compliance with it, and, if he be worldly-wise enough not to give way to its wildness, yet not entertain so much heavenly wisdom as to shut his ears to the quibbling, shuffling excuses which the fleshly heart is always making for sin? Here is our second enemy; must he not be met with violence? Let us now see the third and last.

He is the one whom we must resist more violently than all, for they draw all their power and might from him; he is their living director, and they are but his dead instruments to do his work; he is the father of lies to their falsehood,

⁵ Rom. viii. 8.

⁶ Gal. v. 24.

and of violence to their violence, "walking about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour⁷." Need I mention, whom you must all have understood, the devil? He is the prince of this world to direct it in its rebelliousness against the King of heaven, and the prince of the power of the air to work in the children of disobedience, both in body and in spirit. Violent he is indeed; but God be thanked, he is, like all violent persons, weak when firmly resisted: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you," says the Apostle St. James; and the power of resistance is assured to us, if we will pray for it in Christ's name, who hath Himself taught us to say, to our Father in heaven, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Such, then, is the violence which the kingdom must suffer from our earnest struggles to make a sure entrance into it; such being the enemies through which we must force our way. But where is the force with which the violent take it? It is not indeed in ourselves; our own arm can bring us no salvation; but the arm of the Lord has been revealed to us; He has furnished strength to stand, He has prepared for us the armour of light; and would we but read and hear his word with due diligence, and watch the calls of his Holy Spirit, then we should con-

⁷ 1 Pet. v. 8.

tinually hear his voice, crying in the secret chamber of our hearts, "Why do you stand still? Why are you off your watch? Is the enemy ever off his watch? Is he not ever nigh at hand? Why are you lukewarm and faint-hearted? Is not your salvation to eternal life, and deliverance from everlasting death, at stake? Would you not fight manfully for your life in this world; why not then for eternal life in the world to come? Do you want an example to encourage you? There is mine: I fought in my temptation, in the various sufferings of my ministry, in my agony, in my death on the cross, and I conquered. And I fought for you, and not for myself; and I conquered for you, and not for myself; for what had I, as King of heaven, to conquer? And I have given unto all that fight under me power to conquer, and they shall inherit eternal life. But remember what I have said to my beloved Apostle St. John, concerning the fearful; I have set their portion together with 'the unbelieving, and the abominable, and the murderers, and the whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, who shall have their part in the lake which burneth with brimstone and fire⁸.' Will you then fear, and not manfully fight against the powers of darkness, which are your enemies and mine? Will you consent, in cold indifference, to the doings

⁸ Rev. xxi. 8.

of a wicked world? Will you not be violent in your struggle against them for my sake, and for your own? Let your cause be mine, and then mine shall be yours, and I will fight for you from heaven, 'as I have done for my people from the first, and nothing shall harm you. You are not to expect peace in this world, if you would secure peace for the world to come. In this world, I have told you, you must have tribulation, from the violence of your struggle against it. But I have also said, 'Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.' The kingdom of heaven is set before you; the devil, the world, and the flesh, are between: be violent, therefore, push onward, and take it by force."

SERMON XXVII.

THE SIN OF SWEARING.

MATT. xxiii. 22.

“ And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by Him that sitteth thereon.”

IF the Christian be asked to produce one of the clearest and commonest examples of the universal corruption of man's nature, he will choose the custom of swearing. It is a calling of Almighty God to witness to the truth of what the swearer is saying ; and therefore even where it is lawful, it is a proof that man's nature is so false, that we cannot believe one another on our own testimony in any matter of importance ; and where it is unlawful, as being uncalled for, it is one of the very plainest proofs of forgetfulness or ignorance of God. It is always, therefore, a deep mark of sin and corruption. Those who are acquainted with the writings of the heathen know how their

common speech was full of swearing : and among us, who are such swearers as drunkards and liars ? and when is a man who is not in the habit of swearing tempted into it, but when he is in a fit of ungodly passion ? We may all remember that when Peter denied Christ, he began to curse and swear ; into such a passion did his vehement assertion of a falsehood throw him. And every one that swears in his speech now denies Christ ; for it is not possible that at the moment he can believe in Him. He must, if he ever had Him, have put Him out of his heart, out of his sight, cast out the faith in Him, the hope of Him, the love of Him.

Whenever a man says “by God,” or “by the Lord,” he uses language to this effect : “What I say is as true as that there is a God, or that the Lord is in heaven ; and if I say false, take me for one that denies that there is a God : so I am willing to undergo the consuming wrath of God which comes upon all deniers of Him, if what I say be not true.” Such is the substance of swearing ; and can there be a greater affront of the Divine majesty, a more wilful disgrace thrown upon his glory, a more audacious tempting of the Lord our God, than to use such language on common occasions ? But how continually is it used in quarrels, in threats, in jokes, in any thing ? and so does the sinful habit grow, that some men can hardly utter three words together without it. O that they would

consider what a shocking offence they are thus continually committing, continually making God a liar, continually defying his wrath, continually heaping up against them a treasure of fiery indignation ! It is bad enough to live in ignorance of God ; but the swearer lives in hourly defiance of Him. In short, his habit is one of such desperate wickedness, discovers such a hardened heart, that all consent to reckon him a man of abandoned character wherever he is to be found, and on this very account it is difficult to describe his sin so strongly as it deserves. But every one that will but keep in mind what swearing is, and on what light occasions it is used, cannot but see its true nature, how it is the very expression of the devil's own heart, and will come in for the devil's own punishment.

No wonder that men who abide in the sinfulness of our unregenerate nature cannot often go on without it in some shape or other, though not in the open offensive way which has just been mentioned. They will not swear by God, but by something else, or almost any thing else ; for who can count up the number of trifling and ridiculous things that men will choose to swear by ? If they think that thus they escape the sin of swearing, they are grievously mistaken. The words of my text are direct against them. Our Lord is blaming the scribes and Pharisees who allowed the people to see no sin in swearing by some things, as by the temple and by the altar,

and shows them that all swearing is in fact by God, however men may think to disguise it. He that sweareth by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by Him that sitteth thereon; and still more He tells us, in another place, that a man shall not so much as swear by his head¹. And why? Because he cannot make one hair white or black; that is, because he was not its maker: but God was its maker, and therefore, in swearing by it, he swore by God. And thus He lays down the rule, that we must swear by nothing at all, for to swear by the creature is to swear by God who made it. How indeed can it be otherwise? The creature can be no witness to the truth, and therefore God must be understood in the creature. Thus we see that the man who says, "by my soul," or "by my life," or whatever else, comes in for the full guilt of swearing, and miserably deceives himself if he thinks himself really better than the swearer of outright profane oaths; the thing is the same, it is only the sound that is altered. The sound may be less offensive to the ear of man; but what has that to do with God who sees the thing?

What awful examples is God continually making of swearers! There is no class of sinners of which we hear so often as being taken short in the very midst of their sin; and there is none of whom it is more dreadful to think at such a moment. What a change! to be brought

¹ Matt. v. 36.

in a moment before the blaze of that tremendous Majesty which they were so daringly affronting, and to be cast into the darkness of that pit which they were challenging for themselves !

Can, then, the Christian have any thing to do, in any shape whatever, however disguised to the human ear, with such a habit? Impossible ! It is contrary to the very first principles of his nature. As well may God have to do with Satan, and heaven with hell. If he be Christian indeed, and not by outward title and profession only, then he is born of God, received into his heavenly family through the adoption of the Spirit, and sees the same daily sight with that family, and hears the same daily words with that family, and speaks the same daily language with that family. And what are these? The daily sight is that of God the Father on his throne, with Jesus Christ his only-begotten Son on his right hand, who is there waiting the day of his appearing in glory on earth again to judge the quick and the dead. The daily words are the glad tidings of salvation, the sure promises of God in his Son our Saviour, the comfort, the encouragement which come into his heart and speak unto it from his Holy Spirit. The daily language is that of confession, praise, and thanksgiving, which heart and lips utter before the throne of God, to the footstool of which the spirit is admitted through the access in Jesus Christ.

Can such a man, then, have any thing to do with a sin which directly affronts God Almighty, which his Lord Jesus Christ has condemned in the most positive manner? How can it be supposed for a moment? It is now mentioned merely for the sake of showing the real nature of the sin, how utterly destructive it is to the soul and body of man. It is the very surest sign of a man being far, far as possible, from God, as far as darkness from light, as hell from heaven. Surely no man can be aware of the full extent of the sin, when he commits it. But is this any excuse for him? None whatever. No one is ever, even in the most outrageous sins, aware of their full extent. Men could not possibly commit them if they were. All sin is done in blindness more or less. But is not that very blindness sin? has it not been brought on by indulging in sin? The swearer thinks not of the daring affront which he is offering to the Divine Majesty; he thinks not of the tremendous punishment which he is calling for upon himself. But why? Because his heart has been far away from God, he has never looked up to God with the prayer of faith, or offering of obedience. He has never sought Him with the love of a son, never considered Him as Judge of his stewardship. But he has avoided all thoughts of Him, and every place and company that have to do with Him. How, therefore, should he have any notion of the blaze of the glory of the Divine

majesty of God, before which the seraphim cover their face as they cry one unto another, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory²!" How should he fear to affront it! how should he hate every thought and word that could bring dimness upon it in his sight!

But he goes farther still. In the natural rebelliousness of man's unregenerate heart, he actually finds a pleasure in affronting God, whom he does not know sufficiently, so as either to love or fear Him. There is in such a heart a pleasure and a pride in insulting, when it may be done safely, all that ought to be respected and venerated. And when it has put judgment and hell out of mind, it will treat God Almighty Himself in the same manner; and thus the swearer swears himself into deeper desperation. Every oath he makes brings him so much lower down to the pit, where the father of lies is ready to receive him as one of his children most after his own image, and deepest, therefore, in eternal condemnation.

But men often swear without knowing. Many, very many words, which pass in common conversation only for words of stronger assertion, are, in fact, when we come to examine them, nothing more than oaths cut down, as it were, the most offensive part being lopped off, so that

² Isa. vi. 3.

men may have the pleasure of using them, without fear of the expense of God's judgment. The solemnity of this place will not allow me to give any examples, but many, no doubt, will occur to your minds. The Christian will carefully avoid all such. There is one golden rule which he will find a sure guide to keep him from the use of every improper word of this sort. I will give it in the words of St. James, who almost repeats the words of our Lord Himself; "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation³." Here he warns us against all vehement assertion, as likely to lead us into oaths. We should be content in common conversation with yea and nay. Most words that go beyond these are but oaths cut short by time and use, and a growing sense of common decency, and are therefore most unfit for the mouth of the Christian. It may require a more than common knowledge of our language to be aware of this their real nature. But if the Christian shall be aware that there is such a class of words in our language, then, if he be in earnest, if he feel at heart for the honour and glory of God, will he not do all he can to keep himself clear of the use of them? And this he will be able to do, if he will

³ James v. 12.

follow the rule of St. James. Surely, it will be his constant care that he fall not into condemnation, however unknowingly.

The Christian profession is not indeed one of words; but while fine speeches will not prove it, bad words do most openly disprove it. Has not our Lord said, "That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment⁴;" that is, of every word uttered in careless unwatchfulness of heart? Where, then, shall the swearer appear, who uses not only idle, but most profane words? Let, therefore, a man judge himself, that he be not judged of the Lord. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." It is impossible for a man who allows his mouth to utter words which contain in them any semblance or relation to an oath, to have in his heart the Spirit's testimony to his being a child of God, and inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. The testimony is directly the contrary. It is that of the unclean spirit within him, asserting his possession of him, and making use of his heart to rebel against God, and of his mouth to affront Him. Few, it is to be hoped, if any, open and habitual swearers, are among us. But there may be some who commit this shocking sin from ignorance and inattention to the real nature of the language which they use. The rule of

⁴ Matt. xii. 36.

St. James makes such language avoidable, and therefore inexcusable. May his grace cleanse every unclean lip among us, by the renewal of the heart to righteousness and true holiness, through Jesus Christ our Lord !

SERMON XXVIII.

SPIRITUAL MADNESS.

Conversion of St. Paul.

ACTS xxvi. 25.

“ But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus ; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.”

THIS was not the last time that the professor of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus has been charged with madness by the children of this world. Madness and folly it does seem to them to forego any advantage of this world for the sake of the world to come ; to walk by faith in the things unseen, and not by the sight of the things which are before their eyes ; to fear and obey God, whom we cannot see, and not fear and obey man rather, whom we can see ; to prefer the uncertain future, as they think it, to the certain present ; the pain of resisting temptation to the pleasure of indulging the appetite, and the sanctification of the spirit to the riotous gratification of the body. All this does indeed appear to

them madness and folly: but then comes the question with them, "What is madness?" When we have answered this, we shall see whether they are not themselves the madmen, and the children of light the only persons in the world who do really speak forth the words, and act out the works, of truth and soberness.

We all agree to call by the name of madness the want of that common sense which we know to be necessary for the use of this world. It may be greater, as in the case where a man violently resists the rules by which we must live in this world, and lives by a fanciful rule of his own making, in a world of his own, according to his own laws, setting up his own mind, will, and pleasure, against the mind, will, and pleasure of all men living; or it may be less, being rather an inattention than a resistance to the rules of common life, and may so be called by the milder names of oddity, singularity, eccentricity, though this is often but the beginning or the symptoms of the other. Such persons do not go by what they hear and see, like other people, but by what they fancy and imagine; and therefore they can have nothing to do with truth, which comes through seeing and hearing, but with all the delusions of falsehood, which come from their own wild imaginations: and therefore also, instead of soundness of mind and soberness of thought, they are full of derangement of mind, and flighty extravagance of thought.

Such being our estimate of madness, can we wonder that the children of a world dead in trespasses and sin should think the profession of the Gospel of Christ to be madness, opposing as it does their corrupt rules of life and sinful conversation, contrary as it is to the thoughts of their heart and all their notions of what is convenient, demanding as it does from them a change of life, of heart, of head, of affections, and an awakening of the conscience from its accustomed slumber? Can we wonder that Festus, who was indeed one of the very fittest representatives of the children of the darkness of this world, should be full of astonishment at the words of St. Paul? And when he heard him tell of the heavenly vision of Christ unto him, and relate the change which thenceforward took place in him, and declaring how he witnessed everywhere, both to small and great, the fulfilment of the promise that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles, can we wonder that such a man cried out, "Paul, thou art beside thyself: much learning doth make thee mad?"

But has not Festus too many on his side, yea, even from among such as make an outward profession of the Gospel of Christ? That outward profession, be it observed, is now no longer thought madness, only because the world around us has assumed it for its dress and fashion.

But does not the world, with this very outward badge upon it, rebuking as it does its inconsistency, call the real and inward confession of the heart madness? Does it not continually accuse the true followers of Christ of being unnecessarily serious, too scrupulously strict, too conscientiously good, too singular and distinct from the world? Does it not reckon their joy of believing most melancholy, and their sorrow of repentance most unaccountable? Is not Christ crucified foolishness to it as much as ever? Does it not regard the death unto sin, the new life unto righteousness, as soon as ever they are put forth from the dead letter into the living spirit, as unreasonable, and the subduing of the body, and the bringing under subjection the corrupt affections, as severities which a bounteous, kind, and merciful God does not require? Does it not stare with astonishment at the singularity of Christian conscientiousness, and scoff at the particularities of Christian watchfulness, temperance, diligence, and dutifulness, and as much as say to such as exercise themselves in these things, "Ye are beside yourselves; too much learning, that is, too much attention to the word of God in Jesus Christ, doth make you mad?"

But now, in answer to all this, the sincere Christian may not only reply in his own defence in the words of St. Paul, "I am not mad, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness," but may go also further, which St. Paul could

not do with Festus, who was a consistent heathen, and fling back the charge of madness on the world around, which is inconsistently Christian. Is it not one of the most glaring exhibitions of madness to put on a dress which is out of all accordance with our real condition, as if a man should put on that of a woman, a soldier that of a clergyman, a clergyman that of a soldier? Yet there is the world, with a heart unchanged, with affections set on things below, with a conscience asleep in the deadness of sin, wearing the outward fashion and dress of the disciples of Christ, whose heart has been changed, whose affections have been set on things above, whose conscience is wide awake to the things of righteousness. Surely there is as much madness in this as in those other examples, and of a more serious nature too. It was a keen, though untrue saying of the madman, that he, and the few like himself, were the only people in their senses, and that the rest of the world reckoned them for mad, because they were so singular from not being mad as the world was. It is, however, alas! a saying of truth and soberness, that on things of the world to come this world is mad, and reckons mad the comparatively few who are in their sound senses on such matters, because they are therefore unlike itself. For is it not madness indeed not to accept salvation when it has been offered; not to prefer life to death, and heaven to hell; not to prepare

for eternity rather than for time ; not to choose the interests of the immortal soul before those of the mortal body ; not to have faith in God rather than in man ; not to love Him who made us and sustains us ; not to fear Him who in a moment can unmake us and will judge us at the last day ; not to join heart and voice in the worship of Him whom all the angels of God worship ; not to hope in Him who is our resurrection and our life ; not to follow Him who is the way and the truth ? Is there any madness on the subject of the things of this world which is equal to such madness as this ?

But we may go further still in showing the extravagance and the danger of such madness. It is agreed that madness in any person is that derangement of mind which prevents him from making a rational and proper use of the things of the world around him. Now by our Christian profession, while we use this world in which our bodies now are and do not abuse it, we at the same time proclaim that we are living in another world in our spirits, that we are walking by faith, looking at the things which are not seen and are eternal. But are we making a right use of this spiritual world into which we have been so mercifully introduced ? If a man be not, is he not a madman in it, quite as much as any madman that does not make a right use of this world ? What would you say of the man in this world who would never look up to the sky, hated the light

of the sun, preferred the darkness of the night, refused the meat and drink which are necessary to the body, kept aloof from fellow-men, perversely did that which no one in the world did beside, and when he was starving cared not to forfeit a large estate, and when he was perishing refused all help, laughed where others wept, went purposely crooked on a straight road, and shut his eyes while he ran on a way that was full of people and carriages? Would not all cry out with one mouth that he was not fit to be left at large?

And yet what words can describe more nearly than these the use which the many make of the state of high spiritual privilege in which God's mercy has placed them? There is heaven, yea, the heaven of heavens, opened to them, and showing Jesus Christ at the right hand of God; but do they indeed lift up the eyes of faith to look? There is the sun of righteousness; do they not prefer the darkness of this world? There is offered the heavenly meat and drink which perish not; are they not refused? There is the company of the sons of God; do they not keep aloof from it? There is the will of God to be done; do they not resist it? They are in the miserable nakedness of the natural man; do they not refuse the clothing of the spiritual man, the righteousness in Jesus Christ? The everlasting estate of heaven is offered to a man; does he care to lose it? He is assured of deli-

verance from the destruction of hell ; does he not decline to be helped out of it ? The children of God weep at his folly, which is bringing him to eternal ruin : he makes merry laughs, at it and at them. He has had set before him the straight road of the Lord's commandments, which will lead him to the straight gate : he chooses the crooked path of disobedience. He has eyes given him to see all the hindrances with which Satan besets the Christian course : he shuts them. Is such a madman fit to be left at large ? and is there no place of confinement for him ? Is not the law of that world as much against madmen as of this ? Yes, there is a place of confinement ; and if the madness shall have continued long enough to become incurable, the confinement is everlasting.

Let us remember, then that too much learning of the ways of this world does make us mad as to the ways of the world to come. We can then but abuse them to our destruction. But our true position, if we be Christians indeed, is the world to come ; our true learning is the learning its ways, the being acquainted with its promises in Christ of everlasting life, which are indeed words of truth and soberness. To such let us give diligent heed, in such let us grow up, and thus let us become wise unto salvation.

SERMON XXIX.

QUENCHING THE SPIRIT.

1 THESS. v. 19.

“ Quench not the Spirit.”

LIGHT is the first necessary of life in this body ; without it we cannot go about to seek our livelihood ; without it we lose health and die. And such, also, is knowledge to our inward man. Thus God to us is light : Jesus Christ his Son is the light of the world. John the Baptist, his forerunner, was a burning and a shining light. His Apostles He calls the light of the world ; and they that learn of the Lord Jesus Christ are said to be light, and to have the light, and to walk in the light. And the next means of heavenly knowledge is the grace of the Holy Spirit. Through his inspiration the word of the Lord has been delivered to us by his Apostles

and evangelists, and his prophets, and through his provision it is brought before our eyes, and by his teaching it is conveyed to our hearts and understandings. Hence He is to us a great light; and the Christian has received from Him light to direct him in all his ways. This light the text bids us take care that we do not quench.

Now a light may be quenched in two ways, (1) either by neglecting to feed and trim it, (2) or by wilfully putting it out at once. Let us consider these two ways as to the quenching of the Spirit.

(1) Every gift, and much more every gift of the Spirit, comes from God with a commission to put it to account. Heavenly light, therefore, must not be suffered to grow faint; on the contrary, it must burn brighter and clearer, and like every earthly light, it requires to be fed. So, while coal, wood, and oil, and other things, serve for fuel for the one, Christian practice serves to maintain the other. Do we not know that not even the light of earthly knowledge can be maintained without practice? If it is not, or cannot be brought to bear upon this, and to be exercised by this, it soon goes out, and becomes darkness. Much more is this the case with heavenly light. God has given it for that especial purpose. And our Lord has represented the miserable consequences of neglecting it, under the parable of the ten virgins, of whom five

were wise enough to take oil with them for their lamps, and five were so foolish as to forget it.

For example, "we know," as St. Paul tells the Corinthians, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich¹." Here is light indeed to our consciences and to our hearts! And if we will consider these inestimable spiritual riches; if we will thankfully put them to account, seeking all occasions of giving honour and glory to God, and doing the service of our Lord Jesus Christ; if we will be good and faithful stewards of them, zealous of good works, following his example from a faith which worketh by love, ever abounding in the work of the Lord, then we shall know more and more of these riches, we shall prize them more and more, and we shall, above all, more and more estimate the price at which our blessed Saviour bought them for us, so that we shall be still more careful to increase them, still more watchful against all waste. The price of his poverty, which began with stripping Himself of his robes of heavenly glory, and ended in his death on the cross and burial in the grave, will be felt to the bottom of our hearts, and will be brought home to us by a practical death unto sin, by crucifying sinful flesh with its affections and lusts, and by a practical burial with Christ, out

¹ 2 Cor. viii. 9.

of the sight of all wicked conversation of this world. Thus our knowledge of these grand truths of our salvation will grow into experience, which daily becomes more large and more lively, and adds to our knowledge, giving it a clear and stedfast flame, so that as experience widens, our light brightens.

This instance is sufficient to show that the experience of practice is the oil to our light of knowledge from the Spirit of God. It is for this that we must provide if we would be as the wise virgins. What, indeed, can the most enlightened understanding, though it have all knowledge, even the most heavenly and spiritual, do for us, if the heart remain dark? And dark it will remain without experience, which is not the mere having, but the making use of, that knowledge. It will indeed do this for us, it will bring us under the condemnation of which our Saviour speaks, that "light is come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

We must, then, put into practice the knowledge which the Spirit of God hath communicated to us all, that, namely, of salvation in Jesus Christ. We must seek the heavenly things to which it invites us; we must follow out the path along which it lights us amidst the darkness of this world. We must not sleep, for we are not of the darkness or of the night, but we must be awake, as being of the light and of the day.

We must avoid the unfruitful works of darkness, and we must ever come to the light in our consciences, that our deeds may be made manifest to us that they are wrought in God; so that the light must light us to these deeds to do them, and must light us after these deeds to assure us that we have done them in the spirit of children of light, and sons of God, who is light. We must quicken and awake our will by it, and we must search and try our conscience by it. We must walk by it in all well-doing, not as fools in carelessness, but as wise in all circumspection.

And now, having seen what it is to feed and keep up the light of the Holy Spirit of God, we have only to look at the contrary, and then we see what it is to quench it. Do we ever keep any knowledge by us of things about which we do not care? Assuredly not. We come to know things every day, which every day we forget again, because we felt no interest in them. How few things which we have read in the public papers are remembered a week after, because we cared not to remember, having nothing particular to do with them. But so is the case also in heavenly knowledge; if we do not feel what interest we have in it, we shall quickly forget it. However deep impression it might have made for a moment on our hearts, however bright a flash it may have brought across our conscience, however serious thoughts it may

have raised, yet if we continue sitting down doing nothing, all this will pass away. We can fix it only by rising up and doing. Many, it is to be feared, satisfy themselves too easily in this way. Having received a flash of conviction, they are content with a few serious looks at it, and then leave it to die away; then they seek and obtain another flash, and then in like manner dispose of that; and thus of course every succeeding flash becomes weaker, till all the light is spent, and darkness has come.

Shut up a light in a close place, so that not a ray shall pass forth, and after a little flickering it will go out. It is much more so with the Divine light of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If it be not put forth, if it shine not before men in the deeds of faithful service to the Lord, if it be not cast before the steps of a man to show him the straight and narrow road of holiness amid the darkness of this world, that he may not swerve from it, if it be shut up in the head, and be not burning in the heart, and blazing in the deeds of the hand, lighting it to God's work, then it will assuredly go out, and when the man shall think to look within for light, he will find nothing but darkness.

Is there not often something very melancholy in seeing a light go out, especially when we have no means of obtaining another? It makes, as it were, death-struggles, in uncertain and strong flashes, which grow weaker and more flickering,

and we expect every look that we gain at what we are about or what is around us to be the last. How anxiously do we regard it when some most important work within doors, or some most dangerous road out of doors, is before us ! And how do we lament then our providence that we had not provided ourselves with more oil, or with another wick !

But can anything of this kind of accident be compared, as to sad and sorrowful, with the going out of heavenly truth, because men have been careless to maintain it by proper use, by experience, by watchfulness ? O, what more melancholy than the quick but broad flashes of the dying light of conscience, which show him for the last time where a man really is ? What more painful than the last struggle of the light of neglected heavenly truth, before it sink in darkness ? And then how thick is that darkness !

God leaves not Himself without a witness in the heart of man ; and when the man is resolved upon sinning against light, He makes that light shine in bright flashes, in mercy to convince him, or in judgment to condemn him, and then leave him to utter darkness.

(2) Few men indeed will venture to put out the light of themselves ; most men let it go out from carelessness. But carelessness will of itself bring on that desperate and wilful wickedness, because neglect of heavenly light brings

a man to commit deeds and cherish affections which will not bear that light; and then he hates the light, and hastens to put it out. And this is the reason why too many, alas! become unbelievers. They know that their lives will not bear the searching examination of the light of Christ, and therefore they persuade themselves to disbelieve Christ and the things of Christ altogether.

But the lamps of the virgins once quenched could not be lighted again; and the lamp of the knowledge of Christ, given by the Holy Spirit of God, if once suffered to be quenched, has nothing left to keep it burning, and cannot be lighted again. Does not St. Paul tell the Hebrews, that it was impossible for those who were once enlightened, and had tasted the heavenly gift, and been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, if they shall fall away, to renew them to repentance²? And has not our Lord said, “If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness³?” Good reason was there, then, for the solemn counsel of St. Paul, “Quench not the Spirit?” O let us, with the thanks not only of our lips, but of our lives, cherish and nourish the light which God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath commanded to shine in our hearts, “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God

² Heb. vi. 4.

³ Matt. vi. 23.

in the face of Jesus Christ⁴;" which treasure we have in the earthen vessels of these bodies. Let us be watchful to keep it burning, to maintain it clear in pure vessels; then, when the cry of the Bridegroom's coming shall be heard, we shall not be afraid, but rejoice to meet Him!

⁴ 2 Cor. iv. 6, 7.

SERMON XXX.

SERIOUS THOUGHTS.

Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity.

JOHN iv. 48.

“Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.”

JESUS knew what was in the heart of man ; there He saw that slowness of belief, and dull unwillingness of comprehension, which takes hold of it when things not of this world are set before it. Propose anything of this world, talk of a person whom the man has never beheld, of a place that he has never seen, of things of which he has never heard, and he is intensely full of curiosity and enquiry, and asks for more and more information. But speak to him of the world to come, talk of the judgment which is there prepared, of the places to be assigned to good and bad, of Christ at the right hand of God, does he commonly ask you to go on, and tell him more about them ? Surely not. If he

has heard of them already, he desires to hear no more ; if he has not, then he will not believe unless you will show him a sign and wonder to convince him.

But Jesus has given us signs and wonders, and sufficient to convince the most obstinate heart : why then are not all Christians believers, that is, not mere professors from the accident of a Christian education, but faithful followers from the reality of Christian conviction ? It is because they have not paid due attention to these signs and wonders. So true is it, that except we see them, we will not believe. Let me exhibit before you one or two of these wonders.

God has an only-begotten Son—is not that a wonder ?—a Son begotten before all worlds, with Him in his glory in the beginning, loved by Him before all things. But what is a greater wonder still, God endured to give this his beloved Son to die for the sins of so vile a creature as man ; and this Son was content to quit the realms of glory, to dress Himself in the foul robes of flesh and blood, that He might suffer death upon the cross. And this Son rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, where He was before, and now sitteth at the right hand of God the Father, whence He shall come in glory to judge the quick and the dead. Is not this a list of past signs and wonders ? If a man saw these, would he not believe indeed ? If his eyes were opened to these, would he not accept indeed the great

salvation which they announce to bring? But the eyes are dull to the sight of them; the attention is taken off from them to the vile and fleeting things of this world, and men cannot believe, because they will not see. Christ hath allowed for the infirmity of our nature, for its unwillingness to believe what it does not wish, and has given signs and wonders that we should believe. But though those wonders surpass the most stupendous wonders of this world, which men so eagerly run after, which men cross seas and risk life to witness; though they are far beyond anything that we can imagine, stretch our thoughts as far as we will, how little are they thought of! Though they are on the spot for us anywhere at any time, so that we need not stir a step, nor risk a bruise, nor spend a mite to see them; though we have but to lift our hearts and not our bodies, to travel in thought and not in deed, how lightly are they regarded! Let a show come into a neighbourhood, and the whole country is in motion; but let the signs and wonders of the world to come be set forth, how faint is the curiosity, how thin, in comparison, is the attendance!

Therefore the Apostle has bidden us “seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God; set our affections on things above, not on things on earth¹.” Surely

¹ Col. iii. 1, 2.

there is no other way of believing unto salvation ; in no other way can we see and understand what to believe, still more feel and believe. We must walk in our Christian profession by faith and not by sight, looking at the things unseen, which are eternal, and not at the things seen, which are temporal. So meditation, which takes the thoughts from time to eternity ; prayer, which lifts the heart from earth to heaven ; reading of the Word of God, which enlightens the understanding from the darkness of this world to the light of the world to come, and purifies the affections of the spirit from the lusts of the flesh ; these must be our instruments for the work of salvation, and these, under the grace of God's Holy Spirit, will not fail to finish that which has been once begun.

At all times we can be thinking ; at all times we can pray ; and all have spare time enough to read, or hear read, sufficient for a day's or even week's stock of thought and prayer ; for ever so little Divine truth, if it be but read or heard with earnest attention, and a desire of improving heavenly knowledge, comes into the heart like the grain of mustard seed that becomes a tall tree ; it shoots into a thousand spiritual and heavenly thoughts, as the tree spreads into innumerable branches ; and it bears the beautiful and countless blossoms of prayer, which open so joyfully to the beams of the sun of righteousness, and it brings forth in due season the abundant

fruit of holy living. What excuse then is there for not seeing these heavenly signs and wonders? While our limbs are in motion at daily work we can think and pray; still more when they are at rest in the darkness of the night, we can think and pray. .

It must not however be concealed, that there is a grand difficulty to start with: we must make up our minds to serious thought; many mistake serious for melancholy, and reckon the news of things beyond the grave for things of the grave, and are reminded by life to come of death to come. But why is this? Because they will not look long enough, or steady enough. They are unwilling to lose sight of the world for a moment; in it they have placed all their joy, and therefore a look out of it they reckon to be a look beyond their joy, and therefore into the regions of sorrow; but only look, only cast one earnest look, only fix the eyes for one steady gaze, and then how all is altered! then appears the brightness of joy, before which the world seems dim with sorrow; and as when you look up at the sky out of the darkness below, at the first glance you see but a star or two, then more and more come into sight, until at last you see the heavens filled from one end to the other with an innumerable host of shining lights, and the heart cannot help crying out, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth

his handywork².” So it is when we once have truly looked up to the heaven of heavens, where the Father dwelleth in unapproachable light, and the Son sitteth at his right hand in glory, with all the angels worshipping Him. Then glory is seen shining after glory, mercy after mercy, to the fulness of the heart’s comprehension of the majesty and love of God, and it cannot but cry out, in the words of the Psalm, “He that is our God, is the God of salvation³ ;” or in the words of the Revelation, “Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb⁴.”

Such thought is serious indeed ; but is it not joyful also ? How sorrowful appears the most joyful thought of this poor fleeting world after it ; and now will a man turn aside from serious thought ? will he not take it up as his only true joy and comfort ? When he has made a habit of it, has he not made a habit of heavenly joy, which, like other habits, grows more and more confirmed ?

So will he see signs and wonders, and believe with all his heart and mind ; but except he bring himself to see these signs and wonders, he cannot believe ; he has nothing to stir up his belief, nothing to furnish out his creed.

² Psalm xix. 1.

³ Psalm lxviii. 20.

⁴ Rev. vii. 10.

As well may a man think without having any thing to think of.

You all know the Articles of our Christian belief; they are at hand at all times for thought. Take any one of them at any one time, think on it, and endeavour to think it out. Take, for example, the Article, "And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord." Think of the Son of God, how high and glorious He must be; how mighty to save, how awful to judge! Then think of Him as Jesus Christ on earth in our flesh, as the Son of man, that, in suffering for our sakes, had not where to lay his head; was betrayed, and died on the cross for our sins. Then think of Him as our Lord, having purchased us for his own by his own blood; calling to us from his throne on the right hand of God to acknowledge and obey Him; interceding there for his people; waiting there for the day of his appearing again before the eyes of men in power and great glory; and then being Lord for ever, with his redeemed people with Him, in joy and glory for ever.

These are plain thoughts; these are within the comprehension of every one that cares to comprehend. If they do not come at first, they will all in time, if only a beginning be made. We never know how far the commonest thought on the commonest thing in the world will lead

us, and often wonder at the end how in the world we came to it from the first thought that entered our mind. But how much more must this be the case in thinking of those things which I have been mentioning, because where can we find an end to heavenly truth? It leads us onward and onward, as long as we can think. And one end we are always sure of, and that is the joy unspeakable, the peace which passeth all understanding, which come at the close of all heavenly meditation; whereas the more deeply we think of earthly things, and search out their true nature, so much the greater is the vanity and vexation of spirit that is found at the conclusion.

Such are the signs and the wonders which our Lord hath set before us, that we might believe. And without believing, where are we? What are we better than the heathen that know not God? Rather, indeed, how much worse are we, that through the revelation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ have eyes to see, and ears to hear, the things of eternal life, but through our own carnal wilfulness will neither see with those eyes, nor hear with those ears! Have we not been told, that “without faith it is impossible to please God^s?” For how can we come to Him without it? How can we do his will without it?

^s Heb. xi. 6.

Do not suppose that faith is that mere assent that is given to the things which we have learned from infancy. It is no such still and dead quality ; it is alive and stirring. What else can possibly have to do with things of life, and that life the life everlasting ? How then can we acquire this quality by sitting still, whether in thought or deed ? Far from it ; our thoughts must be set on the signs and wonders of heavenly things, going on from one to another in further spirituality, in growing certainty ; and our deeds must come out of such thoughts as the fruit from the tree. Men are indeed often accused of thinking one way and doing another ; but then they have not thought earnestly ; they have not been spiritually-minded. If they have thought of a heavenly Master, they have thought still more of an earthly master, in some pursuit of this world, and therefore have, of course, followed him who was most in their heart. And this reproach should awaken us to watchfulness and circumspection, that we give not way to the evil thoughts which it is the business of our adversary to sow continually in our hearts. How blessed is the operation of faith, we see from the short history of which our Lord's words in the text are a part. The nobleman believed the word of Jesus, and his child was made well in the same hour. How much more shall the believer himself be made well, raised from death to life, that he might walk in the commandments

of God, and finally arrive at those regions where with his own eyes he shall behold the signs and wonders of the glory of God for ever and ever !

SERMON XXXI.

THE FOLLOWING CHRIST.

St. Matthew's Day.

MATT. ix. 9.

“ And he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.”

“ FOLLOW me ” is the invitation which Christ has given, wherever his Gospel is preached, down from the time when He called his Apostles, as St. Matthew here, to this very day, when it is proclaimed by the stewards and ministers of his word throughout his Church, to flocks which are met together to celebrate their Lord's day with praise and thanksgiving. And they who are mentioned in Scripture, as thus called by Him, are mentioned as also following Him, and are become an example to us that we should go and do likewise. We all well know that this is properly the business of our life

below, that this is the sum total of our Christian profession, the grand rule of its practice. Surely, then, we should be well acquainted with the meaning of such important words, and should not leave the understanding of them to a time when we can no longer perform them.

“Follow me.” Whom are we to follow, and on what road, and to what place?

(1) First, then, we are to follow Christ. Do not the soldiers follow their captain? Do not the redeemed follow their deliverer? Do not the disciples follow their teacher? Christ has been all these things to us, and therefore our business is to follow Him. If one came to take you out of darkness, would you not follow him? If one came to take you out of prison, would you not follow him? If one came to deliver you from death, would you not follow him? But what is the state of sin, but that of darkness, captivity, and death? Will you not therefore follow Him out of sin, leaving it far away behind for ever, and cleaving to Him from whom nothing shall avail to separate the sincere believer? What does He mean in the very words, “Follow me?” Does He not signify in them, that it will not do for any one of us to remain where we are? If we are really following Him, then we must follow Him further and further. If we be not following Him, then we must immediately rise and follow, lest we never have the invitation given us again. And does He not signify in them that

He has something worthy to be obtained by such as follow Him? He laid down his life for our sakes: must we not have been in a most miserable state, that the everlasting Son of the eternal and Almighty Father should go to such an extremity as this, that He that sitteth on the right hand of God, should shed his blood upon the cross? Could He more plainly have condemned sin? Could He more openly have discovered to us the miserable condition in which we are lying, if we be not following Him? And again, must not the state into which He calls us be one of exceeding blessedness, when He has purchased it for us at such an exceeding price, when to obtain it for us, He has come down from his glory in heaven, even unto the cross, even unto hell, and gone up again into his glory? What a journey was here for the salvation of man! Did He not think that salvation of us a thing of the utmost consequence? And shall we, so much more concerned in it, not think so too? Behold then whom we are to follow—Christ, who would have us to be sons of God, people of God, saints in glory, and heirs of eternal life and light! Will a man stop his ears to so merciful an invitation? “Follow me (He cried) from death to life, from darkness to light, from misery to blessedness, from hell to heaven.” Can the voice of the Son of God, giving such an invitation, be unattended to? If a rich man were to call a

famished man to come into his house and be fed, would he not instantly follow? If a king were to call a beggar from the street into his palace, and exalt him to high office, would he not follow? Or, if he should order a criminal at the point of being put to death, to follow him and be pardoned, would he not follow? Yet how much more pressing than such invitations as these is that of Christ! For how can any outward misery of this world and the flesh, be compared with the misery of the world to come, and in the spirit, which is the wages of sin? What state of bodily hunger, bodily beggary, bodily death, can be compared with the extremity of spiritual hunger, spiritual beggary, spiritual death? The call of Christ to follow is a call to be delivered from all these, and to be received into their very contraries, eternal joy, eternal riches, eternal life.

Surely the state of such as refuse this call is one of miserable bondage. Does not the very refusal declare it? Does it not declare that they have lost all natural reason and common sense, and have stopped their ears, and covered their eyes, lest they should hear and see so great salvation? O, shall miserable man be followed as he is? shall he draw crowds of admiring company after him? shall they that cry "follow me" to the places of sin, shall they that cry "follow me" on the road of worldly pleasure, shall these always be heard and followed, come what will?

and that which will come, can be nothing but what must come of every thing of this world in the end, even death! Shall these things be? And when the Son of God cries, "Follow me from eternal death to eternal life," shall He alone be unheard, and never followed? What will He do when He comes again? Will He then cry "follow me" to those who would never follow Him before through all their life, though He called so loud and long? No! He has Himself told us the words which He will use then, when the doors are open ready to receive his faithful followers. His words to those who would not follow Him here will be, not "follow me," but, "depart from me."

(2) Such is He who calls in the words "follow me." And now, what is the way along which He calls to follow? Ha! here it is that we find the reason why men are so slow to follow. Christ hath in his body opened a new and living way, in every sense of the word. But our old corrupt nature dislikes a new way; our death in sin cannot endure a living way; and therefore, in the state of the old, the natural, the unregenerate man, it is not possible that we can have any inclination to follow Christ. We must be renewed in the spirit of our minds; we must put on Christ, the new man. Does a man ask how he must do this? Let him instantly make use of the abundant means which God hath given. Here is his blessed word, let him give ear

to it. Here are the public means of his Holy Spirit in the institutions which Christ hath ordained in his Church; here are the private means of talents, and opportunities, and prayer, let him put them to account. None can say that he has not these at his disposal, to employ them if he will. None can say, therefore, in answer to Christ's call, "follow me," "Lord, I cannot follow Thee; how can I, who am dead in sin, rise of myself, and walk of myself?" In all these means Christ hath said to us all, "Arise, and walk," having given us the power so to do. There is therefore no excuse left. Though we cannot renew ourselves, we have from God the means of renewal. We cannot with our own hands close up a wound, putting the flesh together so as not to show a scar. But we have the means of doing it in our hands, by the remedies which God hath allowed us. And just so, though we cannot of ourselves heal ourselves spiritually, and renew our corrupt nature, yet God hath afforded us the means for it, if we will but use them. Every one, indeed, will confess that he has the means, his own conscience tells him that he has. Scripture tells him that he has, for St. Paul bids the Romans be transformed by the renewal of their mind¹; and tells the Ephesians, that in learning Christ they had learned to be renewed in the spirit of their

¹ Romans xii. 2.

minds². Then why not use them? The way is new. Yes, that is the real answer of the heart. It is unwilling to stir; it would rather sleep on in forgetfulness of God; it would rather slumber on in the idle indulgence of the flesh and the world; it would rather stay and make holiday where it is, than go on a journey quite new to it. It would rather follow its own old accustomed ways, than the new and strange way that is pointed out to it. Even in matters of this world we see this indolence, this dislike to stir in some persons, even when all their worldly welfare manifestly depends upon it. And such persons are justly made light of. What then should be said of one who will not exert himself, or stir a limb to follow, when such a stake as the welfare of eternal life depends upon it? If the other be reckoned an incorrigible and weak idler, how much more must this deserve the title! But such idlers will often rouse themselves from the fear of the bad opinion of the world. Will no spiritual idler rouse himself from fear of the bad opinion of the Son of man, who is coming to judge the world? Shall a man be afraid of being judged by the world, and not be afraid of the Judge of the world?

But is this new way so unpleasant? Is it not called a living way? It is true that it is contrary to every worldly way, for all the world's

² Eph. iv. 23.

ways are ways of death ; but is death pleasant, and life unpleasant ? Can man be so unreasonable as to think so ? What makes a pleasant way ? Will not good company, and good entertainment at the end, make men think the most rugged way pleasant ? Suppose that this new way is rugged for feet being unused to contend with the continual roughness of the stumbling-blocks and stones of offence, with which the conscience at first starting finds it encumbered, yet is there not on that way the continual company of the Son of God, who hath said " follow me ? " And is there not at the end the house of the Almighty Father, ready to receive the weary traveller into its mansions, into a place prepared by Christ Himself, who hath gone before for that very purpose, and where there shall be eternal rest from labour, and joy throughout eternity ? Who that considers these things seriously in his heart will complain of the ruggedness of the way ? But it is not rugged. It only appears so before we be fairly come upon it. To our old unregenerate nature it is indeed rugged, even frightfully so. But in the moment that we are determinedly and really upon it, we are standing on it in our renewed nature, and find all things so accommodated to that nature, that it is smoother than the most level and smooth of roads. The experience of every child of God testifies to this. How, indeed, can it be otherwise ? The renewed will is conformed to

God's will, which governs all things. There is, therefore, nothing to oppose it, but it has its own way. There is no stopping from perplexity, no turning aside from doubt, no turning back from fear. Besides, there is the continually refreshing help of the Holy Spirit; there are heavenly prospects; and as the road mounts higher towards heaven, while the foot is never weary, the prospects of heavenly joy are wider and brighter. Now compare with this the road of any worldly pursuit. Is not that full of all the fear and doubt and perplexity which come from the uncertainty of every thing earthly? Is it not rugged from all kinds of hindrance, mischance, and disappointment? Can a man choose his company so as to be clear of all the bad or disagreeable? If a man look about him, what is the prospect but a scene of the miserable working of sin and death in all the variety of suffering and crime? If he look before him, what end does he see to his journey better than the grave? And if he look beyond that, judgment to come.

(3) Were indeed the roads equally pleasant, yet, surely, the end to which they lead should make the difference. Will any one in his sound senses and calm clear forethought prefer death and judgment to life and glory? Impossible! It is from want of serious thought that men make so dreadful a mistake in their choice. The words, however, of our Lord leave us under no excusable mistake. He has said "follow

me," and is gone into heaven through his cross and grave. So we must take up our cross of self-denial; we must be risen from the grave of the death of sin, we must walk in newness of life; and then that heaven which has received Him as the first-fruits, will receive us as the harvest. So may God grant in us, no less than in his Apostle St. Matthew, the making good those words, " And he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him."

SERMON XXXII.

THE ANCHOR OF OUR HOPE.

HEB. vi. 19, 20.

“ Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil ; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

THIS hope is the hope set before us in Jesus Christ, the principles of whose doctrine are mentioned at the beginning of the chapter ; the hope by which the faithful Christian, in its full assurance, shows the same diligence unto the end. To this he has fled for refuge ; on this he relies as the sailor on his anchor amid the tossings of the deep. For this world has, in every generation and country, been compared to a sea, which is never at rest, at least if it seem to be at rest for a time, and to smile in tranquillity, is then most dangerous of all, most delusive of all, since it is, in the eyes of all that are accustomed to

it, preparing for a more terrible tempest than usual. All are afloat upon it, there being not a moment's rest, and many are tossed upon it with outrageous violence of misfortune, and many sink to the bottom under the hurricane of ruin and despair. In such a state, of course none can be settled in their minds; all is uncertainty; the world seems to be governed by chance, as the sea is stirred by the winds, and vainly do men think to obtain rest in it. Even in their most secure moments, when they think that all is peace around them, they feel a tremulous heave, they hear a suspicious ripple, which tells them that all is far from being so quiet as they imagined, but that a tempest may come on in the next moment, and swallow them up in the deep. Such is the real state of this world, and the reason of this state is sin. It has unsettled every thing by the breaking of God's commandments, by which He rules this world; by rebellion against his word, by which in the beginning He created the world. He had set every thing in the completest harmony, one precept hanging upon another; but man was tempted to break one precept, and then all fell to pieces in the most disastrous confusion, and ever since he has trembled, as in a world of sudden and unexpected accident.

What was to be done in such a world? It must inevitably wreck all that sail upon it, and they must go down to the bottomless pit, which

lies under its tossing waves of rebellious disorder. What hope was there? what hope could there be? who among the sons of men could rebuke the wind, and say unto the sea, "Peace, be still," and then the wind should cease, and there should be a calm? But Jesus Christ, who spake these words to the tempestuous sea of Galilee, has come to our help. He has not indeed stilled the tossing of the deep, for is it not still angry around us? do we not experience continual trials? do we not see daily shipwrecks, warning us that our turn for this world's calamities may come next? But He has given us an anchor, whereby we may hold fast our place, and be still amid the most furious raging of the deep. He has encouraged our faint heart; He has dispelled our fears, and removed our perplexity. We no longer need dread being swallowed up in the deep, and engulfed in everlasting destruction. We have a refuge to flee to, the hope of everlasting life in Jesus Christ our Saviour. This is the anchor to which we trust; and the text certifies to us that it is sure, so that it will not slip, and set us adrift again; and that it is steadfast also, so that we are kept fixed and immovable. What a blessedness is this! Who can duly value it, who has not had his eyes open to the real state of this world? What a sea of disorder it is from the sin of man, and how certain is the destruction of all who put any trust in it! Man cannot even trust

man, whom he knows best of all. What trust then shall he have in any thing else? Nothing seems certain, nothing lasting, but sin and judgment upon sin.

But the nature of an anchor is, that it is fixed in a different element, and holds fast that which is on the top of the water by being fixed in the earth beneath. Such must be the nature of our hope. If it be fixed in any element of this world, it will fail us. To attempt so to fix it, is the same inexpressible folly with his, who should endeavour to fix his anchor in the water which is above ground. And yet this folly is continually going on. Men are putting their whole trust in hopes of this world. And though the world has now cheated men every day, every hour, for six thousand years, still it is trusted. Can any thing show more clearly the sinful corruption of man, how his gross heart and sinful passion have utterly blinded his understanding? Yet thus he too often goes on from the moment that the womb delivers him into this sea to float and toss upon it for his day, until the grave swallow him up. The morrow has always some hope for him, which to-morrow is falsified. He has not fixed his anchor in the ground; and that alone is settled.

And where is this ground? where is this element, as different from this world, as earth is from water? This world is full of sin and misery, darkness and gloom, fear and uncer-

tainty, wrath and judgment, death and destruction. Need it be said where is the contrary? What is that world where all is innocence and happiness, light and joy, confidence and security, blessedness and glory, life and eternity? Is it not heaven, whither Jesus has entered?

And this lies behind the veil. As this world was typified in the Temple by the holy place where sacrifice was offered, so the world to come, even heaven, was typified by the Holy of Holies, where the blood was sprinkled and the incense offered. Between those two places in the Temple was a veil, that the people in the outer place might not see what was going on in the inner, which it was forbidden every one to enter save the high priest alone once in the year. Jesus Christ is our High Priest; He hath offered on earth the sacrifice of his body on the cross; and He has gone within the veil into heaven, there to do what remains of his office, even to plead for us, as our Intercessor.

So believing in Him as the Lamb which taketh away the sins of the world, looking for salvation in that sacrifice which He has offered once for all for the sins of the whole world, we follow Him still with this lively hope; we pass with Him the veil which separates the things seen and temporal of earth, from the things unseen and eternal of heaven, and so this hope

entereth into that within the veil, whither Jesus our forerunner is entered on our behalf.

Here we have found the one and only anchor, here we have found it sure and steadfast ; it is fixed in things immoveable, unchangeable, as they are heavenly and eternal. What power of this world can break such a hold as this ? Can all the violence of its storms avail to unfix it, if once but truly fixed ? But there is the question. An anchor to hold must go some depth in the ground ; if it be at but little depth, it will trail along with the motion of the water, and in a short time will be loose altogether. So we must go with our hope deep into heaven, so as to abide there ; it must not be fixed in so shallow a way that any thing of this world should move it ; and yet is not this too frequently the case with our heavenly hope ? It is not purely heavenly, it partakes also of earthly hopes ; we are loath to loose all hold of this world. Here is the grand trial ; many allow themselves to drag on half in this world, half in the next. We are so afraid of not going with the tide of the world, that we are unwilling to fix deep enough in the world to come ; we have not all courage enough through faith to endure to be so unlike our neighbours as to keep steady to our place in all the seriousness of our Christian profession, while our neighbours are all afloat in the ease and carelessness of worldly indulgence. How many who think

that they have fixed their hope in heaven in their morning prayer, have found it loose again by the time of evening prayer, and instead of having remained immoveable in their good resolutions, have discovered, on calmly examining the events of the day, that they have drifted with the tide of this passing world of chance and change, have moved from the place to which their hope in Christ was to fix them; and perhaps at the end of the week, if they seriously look back, are admonished by their consciences, that their hope has not been surely fixed where true joys are to be found, but that, like the dragging of an ill-fixed anchor, it has been now fast, now loose, now in heaven, now in earth, steadfast in the morning, in motion at night, or fixed to-day, unfixed to-morrow! Such is the course of half-resolutions, unsteady purpose in the Christian; and is it not a course too familiar with our knowledge and experience?

Our hope must indeed enter within the veil, out of the sight of worldly things, into the sight of heavenly things; and when once clearly entered, what does it see there? Who shall describe the glory of the spectacle, the joy and comfort of the heart? There it beholds Jesus Christ, being made a priest after the order of Melchisedec; that is, as is explained in the next chapter of this Epistle, a priest, not earthly and mortal, like the Jewish high priest, who made intercession once a year, but heavenly and

immortal, ever living to make intercession for his people, and thus able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. What confidence is there now in prayer, seeing that He, who hath promised that whatsoever we shall ask in his name, that will He do, is there ready to accept that prayer, and offer it up with his intercession at the mercy-seat of the everlasting Father !

But the same Jesus Christ is there, all life, all glory, who died on the cross, and was buried in the grave : there He cries out to us, " I am he that liveth, and was dead ; and, behold, I am alive for evermore ¹." There He is, the first-fruits of them that slept ; there He is, our resurrection and our life ; there, whither He has gone to prepare a place for his people, who having in this life fixed the anchor of their hope sure and steadfast in Him, shall there, after the troublous voyage over the sea of this world, be received into the haven of his eternal and everlasting glory. Thus He has become the forerunner of his people, being the first to enter heaven with a human body, and to exhibit it in incorruption, in glory, in power, and in spirituality ; there He is the representative and image of all that are to follow, who, when He shall appear at the last day to receive them in, shall be like Him, so like as to be able to see Him as He is ; there

¹ Rev. i. 18.

He is for us the way, having gone before us on earth as an example, that we should follow his footsteps ; having gone up into heaven that we should follow him thither also, in affections set on heavenly things, in prayer made in his name, while we are here, and in bodies made glorious by the working of his all-subduing power hereafter.

Such is the hope in our Lord Jesus Christ : how sure, how steadfast, if we have but the faith to fix it, so that it shall enter into that within the veil ! Shall not every day, as it convinces us, as surely it must all serious thinkers, of the miserable uncertainty of this world to all, and the dreadful certainty of the world to come, to such as will not prepare for it ; shall not every day, I say, find us more and more confident in this hope, and therefore more and more resolute in the work of attaining its blessed fulness and substance in the world to come everlasting ?

SERMON XXXIII.

ON READING SCRIPTURE.

ACTS viii. 28.

“ Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.”

THIS minister of the queen of Ethiopia is a pattern for all such officials in at least one thing. He had a great regard for the truth of God's word, and obeyed it, and promoted it with all his heart. The law of God ordered all the males in the land of promise to appear three times in a year before Him in the temple. When the faithful were scattered into distant lands, still the more zealous among them used to go once. Among such was this person. He had gone up all the way from Ethiopia to Jerusalem, to worship the Lord God. What a journey was this! At least 1500 miles, and this too across frightful deserts, and over lofty mountains,

through scorching heat in the one, through drenching rain among the other. But he was going to worship his God in the appointed place, and we may imagine him, amid his greatest inconveniences, crying out in the words of the 84th Psalm, "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee." Here was truth and sincerity indeed! This man did indeed worship his God in sincerity and truth. If any one could have a reasonable excuse for staying away, surely he had. Minister as he was to the queen of a powerful kingdom, entrusted with the charge of her treasure, he must have had enough to do. But he knew that God must be served first, and not put off to the last with the leavings of the service of men; and, therefore, he undertook a journey about 700 times as long as the furthest of us have to come to church. It led him not by a road or church-path, but through wild countries abounding with wild beasts, robbers, and not through half an hour of hot sun and hard rain, but through weeks. Here is an example indeed of attendance on the public worship of the Lord. Are not too many professors of the Gospel of Christ put to shame by this pattern of the follower of the Law of Moses?

And if his going up was a pattern, so also was

the manner of his returning. How did Philip find him? He found him sitting in his chariot, or carriage. And doing what there? Only looking about him, or dozing, or reading some idle book? He was not indeed one of those who forget as soon as they quit the house of God what they had heard in it. He had been assisting at the sacrifice of the lamb; and as the grace of God always waits upon the hearty worshipper, the Holy Spirit directed his attention to the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, which plainly foretells the sufferings of Christ, and speaks of Him under the figure of a lamb, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." Thus he was directed to the very passage that promised Christ as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. And the Spirit also appointed him an instructor in Philip, who preached Jesus to him, and he believed, and was baptized. So mightily did God bless the sincerity of heart of this worshipper of his majesty and glory.

Now the first thing that calls for remark here is the fact, that this person was faithful to two ordinances of God, namely, to public worship, and the reading of the Scriptures. Indeed, where one is sincere, the other must follow. The man who has had his heart in his worship

in God's house, will have his heart and head in the Scriptures when he is out of it, for he will go to them as naturally as a man after strong exercise to food. And is not the Christian concerned above all in these two ordinances? There is the Lord's day ordained for the public assembling of ourselves together, to confess our sins, and offer our thanksgiving to Almighty God in the name of our Mediator and Redeemer Jesus Christ his Son our Lord, and to read the Scriptures, and to hear the explanation of them. And again, there is at all times and in all places the Holy Scripture, the reading of which is able to make us wise unto salvation. These ordinances we see that God blessed to this person. Shall He not bless them to us also, if we bring to them a right mind and faithful spirit? If, indeed, we do not bring these, we can expect nothing. God does not hear those who pray only with their lips, nor does He give understanding to the careless. But when He has given us such a precious gift as Scripture, does He not expect that we should make a diligent use of it? And what a book is it! what a lesson is contained in it! For it tells us first of all, of Almighty God, who He is, Lord of heaven and earth, one God, who is holy, and commandeth all to be holy as He is holy; and is a God of mercy and forgiveness to all that come unto Him and obey Him, and a consuming fire to the wicked; and hath appointed a day for judgment,

when all shall give an account of themselves before Him. And it tells us of one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, who died for us, to be the propitiation for our sins, that we should not perish in them, but have eternal life. And it tells of one Holy Spirit, whom the Son sent from the Father into the world to enlighten all hearts, that they may believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and be cleansed, and made new through his sanctifying grace. And it lays down rules for good living, gives warning against evil doing, exposes the snares and traps of the devil, encourages with promises of everlasting life, frightens with threats of everlasting fire, rejoices with us in our joy, comforts us in our affliction, gives us counsel in health, patience in sickness, hope in death. And all this is not the word of man, whose heart is deceitful above all things, but the word of God through his holy Spirit of truth. Was there ever such a book as this? Should we not suppose that all the world were eager to see it and read it? And yet leave it and a newspaper on the same table, and see which of the two will be the sooner taken up. But then the person may say, I know all that the book says, but I know nothing of what the paper says, for the very nature of its contents is, that they are new. But no one does know, no one can know, all that Scripture says. It is new every time that a man seriously looks into it. It is the word of God speaking to the heart.

And every day we may learn something new of God, and something new of our own heart. This is the knowledge in which we are to grow to our life's end. Every thing in that book is in growth to an inquiring mind. Its exhortations grow more impressive, its examples grow clearer, its promises grow brighter, its account of our Lord grows more distinct and touching. And it gives growth. The conscience grows quicker, the understanding grows clearer, the heart grows cleaner, joy grows more lively, love grows more fervent, hope grows more assured, and faith grows more steadfast.

Such was the book which was in the hand of the minister and treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia ; and this treasurer valued it beyond all her treasures. He might have amused himself on his journey in casting up the account of her treasures, in reckoning the number of her cities and palaces, horses and chariots ; in summing up her silver and gold, and precious stones, and costly raiment ; in computing the number of her people, and the miles over which her dominions stretched. But he did not so. There was a season for that, when he had returned and taken up the duties of his office again. But now he was at liberty from his duties to his sovereign ; and we see how he used that liberty. He found no liberty like that of the true servant of God who loves his law, and obeys it from his heart. He found that law a treasure which could never be

emptied, so far from it, that it seemed fuller after every time that he took something away. On coming to it again, he found its precious things more abundant, and more precious than ever.

And now see how God rewards the earnest searcher into the truths of this book; he was reading a part of it, and he found that he could not understand it. Who should explain it to him? This chapter takes care to remark to us that he was now in the desert, for the commission to Philip is, that he should go unto the way that goeth unto Gaza, which is desert; how then could he possibly, in such a place, hope for an interpreter? And yet an interpreter he found; God sent him one in the very midst of the desert, an interpreter who instantly led him into all truth, not only explaining the prophecy of Isaiah, but preaching to him from it, Jesus the Saviour from sin, and Redeemer of the world. And thus his earnest study of the word of God was blessed into the admission into the kingdom of his dear Son, that he might be a child of God and inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. And we are told by some writers of old times, that he was the means of introducing the Gospel into Ethiopia, where it is still, though under much corruption; and the former realms of queen Candace form, at this day and hour, a Christian kingdom in the midst of a vast continent of most besotted heathenism.

Here is encouragement indeed; here we find

what God will do for the enquiry of a sincere heart into his holy word ; He will send an interpreter in some shape or other ; it may be by clearing the understanding, by sending a teacher, or by other means which we cannot foresee. But the help will come, as to all things which are needful for us to understand : no one can take up Scripture with a desire to learn from it, and not learn from it ; and what precious learning too ! To be made wise unto prosperity in this life, is reckoned no small gain ; what then should be thought of being made wise unto salvation and everlasting life !

So does the account of this great man preach to us ; it tells us generally how God blesses every right use of his ordinances and commandments. It is by this very use that we are to go on from elements to perfection : the Holy Spirit is abundant in his means of grace, both in such as have an appointed time and place, like our public worship here, and such as are given from time to time as need calls for them ; by putting these to account, we are to grow rich, to become spiritual kings, robed in the garments of heavenly and spiritual acquirements, and endowed with unsearchable riches in Christ ; through these we are to experience the earnest of the inheritance which has been promised to the children of God. Thus Christ is to be formed within us, thus He is to be brought to dwell in our hearts by faith,

thus we are to have the mind of Christ, and grow into his image and likeness.

But above all, and particularly, it sets before us the importance of the study of God's holy word, which has ever been the delight of the man of God. The 119th Psalm says, "I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word. . . Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. . . Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. . . How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth¹." Now, if the prophet who wrote these words under the inspiration of God could so value the word of God, when its promises were comparatively so faint, when Christ was still to come, and was seen only dimly through the types of the Law, when the Gospel had not yet brought life and immortality to light, how much more should the Christian prize that volume which sets forth Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, before him, sets Him crucified before his eyes for the propitiation of our sins, and promises free and full pardon in his name to all that repent and believe; that cries out to him from every page to come unto Him for salvation unto eternal life; that gives the plain,

¹ Psalm cxix. 15. 54. 105. 103.

direct, and joyful answer to the trembling conscience of man, "What shall I do to be saved?" Can such a book be over-valued? can it be too often taken up, too much studied? Men are ready enough to study their title-deeds, by which they hold their estates, and to take care how they forfeit them, by omitting some particular mentioned in them. It were well if all were as anxious to examine those title-deeds by which we hold the inheritance of eternal life, and to make sure that we do not forfeit it by negligence. And surely it is pleasant to see the particulars of a fine estate, to come to a good understanding of its various valuable qualities, to be acquainted with its fields and houses. Should it not, then, be much more pleasant to learn the various interesting particulars of the estate of the inheritance of eternal life to come, to gain an acquaintance with its realms of light, its regions of glory, and dwellings of everlasting joy? And men take pains to know the road to the neighbouring town where their business or amusement lies; and they soon know it beyond all mischance of a mistake. Why then should they not deeply attend to the instruction of a book which shows beyond all mischance of mistake the road to the everlasting city of the living God, where lies the business of serving before Him for ever and ever, and the pleasure of glory and blessedness in the company of the Lord for ever and ever?

All this will be freely allowed. God grant that it may also be seriously practised ! Surely this treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia, who could so value the treasure of the word of God, and make it the consolation of a tedious perilous journey, will rise up in judgment against all who have that word in fulfilment through the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and neglect it, while he had it but in the earnest of the law of Moses, and made much of it. Our journeys now are shortened indeed : would to God that our study of his word was lengthened in any thing like the same proportion. But if it be shortened, too, through the vain presumption and giddy conceit which fills man upon the success of his own inventions, what will repay for such a loss ? Not all the treasures of this world, though their heap were as deep as the pit of hell, and as high as the firmament of heaven !

SERMON XXXIV.

THE TRUE SACRIFICE.

MAL. i. 8.

“ And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil ? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil ? Offer it now unto thy governor, will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person ? saith the Lord of hosts.”

THE word of prophecy, while it announced the promise of Christ the Saviour, had to rebuke man to the very end. This text is an example from the very last of the prophets, Malachi, who begins with rebuking the unthankfulness of Israel, and ends with a threat of coming and smiting the earth with a curse. Israel gave indeed a melancholy example of the unthankful heart of man. God had brought him back again out of his captivity, had restored him his temple and daily sacrifice, had settled him in his own land again. And how did Israel behave ? He treated God just as knaves in their folly always treat those whom they have found kind

and forbearing, and willing to be satisfied,—they think any thing good enough for them, and therefore requite them with the refuse. So although God in his law had openly commanded, saying, “If there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the Lord thy God¹ ;” yet notwithstanding this most reasonable and strict charge, they offered the blind, the lame, the sick, for sacrifice, and thought to be accepted of God, though they durst not have offered such things to their governor. So far from being pleased and accepting their person, He would have turned them away from his presence as insolent knaves.

But this conduct of Israel is only a lively representation of the way in which God, the giver of all good things, is commonly treated by the receivers of his bounty. Men have found Him so overflowing in kindness, so long-suffering, that they have come to think that He will take up with any thing. They have broken his laws continually, but have not been punished for it ; they have done things deserving of death at his hands, but lo ! they are alive ; they have never thanked Him for his mercy and bounty, and yet his bounty flows on day after day, just as if they had been amongst the most thankful. “Why, what a good easy God this is,” they say in their hearts ; “I need not trouble myself and be

¹ Deut. xv. 21. Levit. xxii. 20.

in any hurry to repay Him. He will be very well satisfied, if after having served myself to the utmost, I give Him the refuse of my life at the end, when I am quite unfit for any other business, when I am blind, when I am lame, when I am sick, when, in short, I am dying." Is not this the common language of the heart? and do we not see examples of such sacrifices every day, in men who, having sinned against God all their life long, think that He will be satisfied with the offering of a few hours of faintness and distraction at the end? They think not of the awful warning in those words, "Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee." They think not, that, though God does not speak out, He is watching and preparing to reckon with them. And however slow He may be, He will set all right on the great day, when He will separate the chaff from his wheat, and the tares from his corn. Then they will find that the abuse of God's long-suffering has laid up for them a treasure of wrath, and they must enter upon possession whether they will or not.

To apply then the words of the text to our own edification, let us remember the sacrifice which the Lord commands us to offer. Through his Apostle Paul He says, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service²." You see

² Rom. xii. 1.

here the spirit of that which was contained in the letter of the law, which forbad, as I have mentioned before, any thing that had blemish, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, being sacrificed unto the Lord. And we are to serve in "newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter³." And the living sacrifice of our body is not only keeping its members in all purity, as we would be members of Christ's body, but also giving to the Lord that from which all purity must come, namely, a heart devoted to his service, and well instructed for that purpose, in all heavenly knowledge and spiritual wisdom. Having given this general application of the text, let me now come to its several particulars.

(1) The prophet says, "And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil?" They had plenty of cattle without blemish to offer to the Lord. But no, these they wanted for themselves. Those that were useless from the first, or had been worn out and gone blind in their service, would do, forsooth, for the Lord. And so the Christian has a body given him which he may present a living sacrifice unto the Lord, without blemish of sight. In it he has an eye to read the word of God, an understanding to receive it; an eye to lift up to heaven in prayer, an understanding to offer prayer and praise in the

³ Rom. vii. 6.

name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the Lord demands that he should continually present his body to Him in this particular,—that his eye be withdrawn from all unholy sights, so that it carry not into the heart the affections of covetousness, lust, ungodly delight, but that it be single and pure, the light indeed to the body, through which the whole body may be light; and that the eye of his understanding may be enlightened, that he may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the Saints. But, alas! instead of all this, to what service is the eye and understanding commonly devoted? Is not the eye too often given up not only to idle curiosity, not only to fleeting objects, but also, in more serious occupations, made a minister of sin, an instrument of temptation. And, meanwhile, the eye of the understanding is given to things which profit not for godliness, but to plans for worldly enjoyment, or to the reading of frivolous and pernicious books, or is left to run altogether to waste in utter forgetfulness of duty both to God and man.

But the true exercise of these, the true and living sacrifice of the body in this particular, is the growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For the ample means with which we have been furnished for this, we shall have to give an account: nor will the Lord be content with our having just

so much knowledge as to be able to cry out, " Lord ! save us, we perish," if we have abused the many and manifold opportunities which we have had of leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and going on unto perfection. Never forget that growth in grace and growth in knowledge go together. The man can care very little about that which he does not care to know ; and the more he cares about it, the more he wishes to know about it. You must not, therefore, flatter yourselves that you are growing in the grace of the Spirit, unless you are growing also in the knowledge of the things of the Spirit, for which you have such abundant means in the holy Scripture, which is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Ignorance in such things is sin, and will be punished as sin.

But instead of thus using the eye and understanding in the spiritual service of the Lord, men waste their light in the pursuit of vanity and sin, until at last there comes the appointed hour of their departure from earth. Then at length they turn their eye and their thoughts unto God. But the eye is dim with sickness, so that the reading of God's word is painful to it ; and the understanding is enfeebled and distracted by the faintness and pain of the body : so when at last they present the sacrifice of their body to the Lord, what do they do but

offer the blind for sacrifice? Is it not evil? The eye is not turned unto God until it has grown dim in the service of the world. The understanding is not devoted to Him, until it is dark with carnal ignorance and vanity. Are the Israelites, then, the only people that offered the blind for sacrifice? How many such sacrifices have there been, and will there be, in the Church of God unto the end of the world!

(2) The prophet next says, "And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil?"

The Christian is compared to a runner, and his life to a course. He is to be making continual advance from one state of grace to another, and higher, from one point of knowledge to another, and higher. He is to run well, to run so that he may obtain, and not uncertainly, but to "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," "running with patience the race which is set before him." But when do men generally begin to set themselves to this race? Just as their course in this transitory world is finishing; when their strength has been wasted in running for earthly prizes; when their days of fleetness have been expended on the eager pursuit of worldly vanities; when their feet have lost all their nimbleness in the long course of sin; when, in short, they are lame to any purposes of a spiritual race, then they think at last of the race which God hath set before them: and then what wonder that they

cannot make straight paths for their feet, but that that which is lame is turned out of the way ! Is not this to offer the lame for sacrifice unto the Lord, and is it not evil ?

Again : is not health the season for serving the Lord on every account, both on our part, because then we are most able to serve Him, and on his part, because He ought to have the best that we can offer, and not the refuse ? But men go the very contrary to this plain rule ; so much so, that many people seem to think that they have nothing to do with the Lord but in the day of sickness. So after they have spent upon themselves the strength of their body, the vigour of their faculties, the joyfulness of their spirits, then at last they think of offering to the Lord the service of a wasted body, of decaying faculties, of low spirits. Is not, in short, the season of a sick bed too commonly the first time that a man seriously thinks of the sacrifice which he has to offer unto the Lord ; and even then do not his serious thoughts and good resolutions last only as long as the season of sickness lasts ? Returning health is given again to his own vain and sinful indulgence ; it is too good, forsooth, to be given to the Lord, who is so merciful as to be content with the dregs and refuse of his offerings to the world ; so he goes on until at length he comes to his last sick bed, and then what does he bring for sacrifice to the Lord ? Israel offered the sick. This Christian does worse

still, he offers the sick and dying. Is it not evil indeed?

(3) "Offer it now to thy governor," the text proceeds to say. Yes! men will treat God, their heavenly Sovereign, as they dare not for their lives treat man, their earthly sovereign. They will treat Him as if He were a mere idol, having ears but hearing not, having eyes but seeing not, nor understanding. Were you to send a present to your queen, would you not be most anxious that it should be the best of its kind, and take all pains in making it so? Do you as much for your King in heaven? When you do offer to Him, do you offer the best of its kind? Do you offer to Him the whole day by a constant remembrance of Him, having the fear and love of Him continually before your eyes, so that you would not knowingly offend against his commandments? Or having spent it all in devotion to the world, and in utter forgetfulness of Him, so that God's mercy, and not your own watchfulness, has kept you out of any grievous sin, then do you offer up the time of a few minutes in faint, and sleepy, and formal prayer? Alas! such a day belongs to a life in which God is remembered but at the close, when He can no longer be forgotten, for He is at hand with judgment.

But some go through life with a fixed purpose of giving to the Lord only the refuse. A man says in his heart, "I will enjoy myself in the

world, and then, after that, there will remain time for repentance." The fool ! that night his soul may be required of him. And let him live as long as he will, repentance is not in his power, as he thinks. It comes not from his own willing or doing ; it is the will and work of the Holy Spirit.

Thus is the Lord treated. The man who bows to the ground, and anxiously seeks favour in the sight of his sovereign, and keeps himself continually in his view by doing something which may please and make his person accepted, this very man will think it a great thing if he kneel in the house of God for a short time once a week. Men who are most particular in wording a petition to be delivered at the throne of their sovereign, and continually weigh every word, and endeavour to turn and polish every sentence, these very men will not trouble themselves to prepare a prayer to be delivered at the footstool of the throne of heaven, through the Mediator Jesus Christ, but will think any unconsidered and distracted words poured forth from the lips, and not from the deeply-searched fountains of the heart, quite sufficient for the Lord of lords, and King of kings. The Lord indeed is long-suffering, and his goodness endureth continually. He is, indeed, slow to anger ; but when his wrath is kindled but a little, blessed are all they that put their trust in Him, for woe to his adversaries. Let us all, therefore, be wise and

instructed now. Let none presume upon his mercy, and tempt the Lord their God. Let all remember their Creator in the days of their youth and health, and not think to put off with the few hours of a last sickness Him who has a right to the service of their whole life. Offer to Him for sacrifice all that you have most precious. the health of your body, the vigour of your faculties, the freshness of your spirit, now, while yet they are yours to offer, before the service of the world shall have utterly corrupted them, and turned them to refuse, and made them unfit for the Lord's acceptance. Offer them while they are precious to yourself, and not when you have done with them. Offer them while yet they can be acceptable to the Lord, while yet there is no blindness, nor lameness, nor sickness, nor any other blemish in them. So will the Lord be pleased with thee, and accept thy person. And thou shalt be partaker in that precious sacrifice which was offered for sin by the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord!

SERMON XXXV.

ON JUSTIFICATION.

JAMES ii. 24.

“ Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”

THIS is a passage not to be passed over whenever it comes before us in the course of the lessons of the service. It concerns the very foundation of our faith, and needs considerable care and clearness to lay it before the minds of others, however a man may have satisfied his own mind about it. May the grace of the Holy Spirit assist me and you on the present occasion.

The grand point is, to show that these words of St. James do not really contradict the words of St. Paul, who says, “ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law ¹.”

¹ Rom. iii. 28.

No man is just in himself in the eyes of Almighty God; "There is none righteous, no, not one," are the words of his Holy Spirit. What then is to be done? Are all mankind to be sent into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels? No: God in his infinite mercy hath made a covenant with man through his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who ratified it with his own blood. By this He agrees to consider as just, as if they had never sinned at all, that is, to justify, all who accept and abide by that covenant.

But how is a covenant accepted between two parties in any case except by faith? and how can they abide in it except by doing the works which are contracted for in it? Much more when one of the parties is entirely at the mercy of the other, as man is in respect of God, what has he to do but to trust himself entirely into the hands of that other, and to fulfil to the utmost of his power all the duties to which he is bound? It is plain, then, that faith is the first thing that we must bring to the acceptance of the covenant in Christ; and not only the first thing, but the only thing; for you cannot do the works of any covenant before you have made the agreement, no, nor in the act of making the agreement. Faith only, therefore, can be concerned in the agreement. When you contract for a work, is not the contract entirely a business of confidence and faith? and can any thing be

done according to contract before the contract be concluded? Is it not plain, therefore, that in the covenant of justification, man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law?

Such is then the broad and naked truth; and thus it was stated by St. Paul against the Jews among the Romans, who resisted the calling of the Gentiles except according to their law, and against the Galatians whom such Jews were persuading over to their opinion. But the broad and naked truth is seldom sufficient to go to practise with. For instance, it is a broad and naked truth that all men are sinners; but would not that man make strange work for himself who should apply it to daily life without any qualification, and treat every one, both good and bad characters, with the same confidence? So, also, we find that the broad and naked truth of justification by faith only was misapplied. St. James is arguing with men who boasted that they had faith, but neglected works. "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?" are his words.

The contract or covenant which men make with one another is concluded simply by acts and forms, expressing the mutual faith of the parties. It is then perfect; but perfect for what? Why, for the parties to go to work forthwith; and unless work does follow, then the contract becomes null and void. So the faith

with which man accepts the covenant in Christ, by which God admits him into it, though it cannot be accompanied by works, must be followed by works, or the covenant does not stand, there has been no justification ; and, therefore, in arguing with a person who so misapplied the doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the law, as to hold that those deeds need never be done, would it not be quite consistent with this truth to tell him, that he was not under the covenant of justification without doing them ; it was null and void, because he had not gone on to them ; that he must not stop short if he meant the covenant to stand, and that, therefore, he must be justified by works, and not by faith only ? Let me illustrate this by a consideration of the real nature of faith.

Faith is not, at its lowest point, mere belief. A man may believe every article in the Apostles' Creed, from " God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth," down to " the life everlasting," and yet not have faith. And does not St. James say, that " the devils believe that there is one God, and tremble ? " Belief is only a step, and the very lowest, in faith. We must believe that a man is honest before we have confidence in him. But the belief is a very different thing from the confidence, so much so, that you may have the belief without the confidence, if you have no dealings with him. So a man begins,

indeed, with believing in the power, the glory, the mercy, the justice of God, especially as manifested in the redemption of the world through his only-begotten Son; but when he comes actually to deal with God, then his belief becomes the confidence of faith, by which he submits unreservedly to the sovereignty of his power; adores as the delight of his heart, which has been brought out of darkness into light, his glory; falls down in the deep sense of convicted unworthiness before the throne of his justice; confesses with thanksgiving before the seat of his mercy; and sees and feels throughout all the glorious and stirring circumstances of the redemption in Jesus Christ a designed application to his condition, which he accepts with joy as new-found treasure, and throws himself entirely upon God, commits his cause entirely to his hands without any doubt, however contrary outward appearances may seem. Such an example St. Paul produces in the justifying faith of Abraham. He and Sarah his wife had long passed the time when it was possible, according to all experience, to have children; and yet, when God took him, and pointed out to him the stars in heaven, bidding him count them, if he could, and promised that such should the children be for multitude that He would give him, Abraham believed this promise of God, held fast hope in Him against all natural hope; and, says the Scripture, "the Lord counted it to him for

righteousness." Such is the nature of faith. It must have the forementioned qualities in it, though it be small as the grain of mustard-seed ; and as it grows, these will become more and more manifest. But they must be in it, as the leaves and branches are in the seed from the first.

And now, how can such faith exist without producing works, as the tree produces fruit? How can a man commit himself unreservedly into God's hands, and not obey Him and keep his commandments? How can he say, as faith bids him say, "Lord, do with me as Thou wilt, for in Thee I entirely trust," and at the same time not do what God wills him to do? So then faith, in order to be faith, must be followed by works ; without them it cannot move, and therefore, according to the comparison of St. James, is dead, as a body without the living spirit in it is dead ; it is but as a still-born child. Works are the manifestation and very operation of its life. Such an example St. James produces of the works of Abraham. Contrary to the strongest feeling of natural affection he was ready, at God's command, to offer up his son Isaac upon the altar, and had actually lifted up the knife to cut his throat, when God, satisfied with his servant's trial, bade him stop. To such a work did his faith carry him in its necessary course : he obeyed God contrary to every hope of this world. Thus the tree of his faith bore its fruit ; and as

no tree is perfect before it have borne fruit, so now, faith, which wrought with his works, was by them made perfect, and Abraham was justified by them, says St. James.

You must carefully bear in mind that he is not so much laying down the doctrine, as arguing against the misrepresenters and abusers of the doctrine of justification by faith. Faith is the fountain-head, whence works proceed, and the justification of man ensues in course. Let me illustrate this by a familiar example: suppose a man to have a mill worked by a stream which ran out of one of our lakes; now it is quite clear that he owes all his water, and therefore all his prosperity on that matter, to the lake. And as the stream has no water of its own, but draws all from the lake, the truth, broadly and nakedly set forth, will be, that he is dependent on the lake only, without any water that the stream of itself supplies. Now with this statement we may compare the statement of St. Paul, that "a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law," which in themselves can avail him nothing; and it would be particularly contradictory to the assertion of all such as maintained that the man was supplied by the stream, without any reference to the lake; give the lake, and you have the stream from its overflow: so faith supposes works. But make a channel ever so broad and deep for the stream, you will have no water if there be no water in the lake: so

works are nothing without faith. And so St. Paul's assertion was especially contrary to the doctrine of the Jews, who would have the Gentiles justified by works.

But suppose now the owner of the mill to say, I entirely depend upon the lake, and so presuming, entirely neglected the stream, never cleaning out its channel, nor repairing its embankments, would not he shortly find out that he must look to the stream too, and that he depended both upon the lake and the stream, and not on the lake only? Such was the mistake of those with whom St. James argues, who said that they had enough in their faith, and neglected works: and accordingly St. James tells them, that they must be justified by works, and not by faith only.

So you see that when we come to enter upon Christian practice, putting our hearts to work, and not our heads only, there is no difference whatever between St. Paul and St. James on the doctrine of justification, whatever may appear upon the first blush of their statements. All, when we look deep enough, agrees together, as every statement of Divine truth made by God's accredited ambassadors must do. In short, we have only to bear in mind that St. Paul lays down the doctrine in its general form as to universal application; St. James states it as we find it in our individual, personal application, in which we call upon our conscience to give us the evidence by facts of our having the faith; and as

mere feeling and sentiment may and do deceive, those facts must be the works of our Christian practice; so though we be justified by faith alone before God, we are justified to our own conscience before Him by works also.

One observation, however, let me particularly press upon your attention with regard to this vital doctrine, that is, the necessity of keeping quite clear and distinct the consideration of faith and of works: faith, as the well or lake; works, as the stream out of it: faith, as the cause; works, as the consequence: faith, as concluding the covenant between man and God in Christ; works, as performing it. It is the mixing the two together that has given occasion to Romanizing corruptions; for if works be included in faith, as by some they are, then they do not bear a second and indirect part, as derived from faith, but they share with faith the principal and direct part, and a man is justified by works on the same ground, and to the same extent, that he is by faith. And since justifying means making just in the eyes of God, he will be ready to recommend himself to God upon the score of merit, and to think to satisfy God, not only for himself, but even for others also, and thus the door is opened wide at once to a flood of superstition. Not but that their operations are so intimately mixed, after action has begun, that we cannot separate them. Proceeding from faith, works in return exercise faith, which is

thus made perfect, as St. James says of Abraham's. But still faith is the only mover, and works act back upon it again by the motion which itself has given: the lake has sent forth the stream, though the outlet of the stream adjust the lake to its level for work: and it is still sending forth the stream again, to be adjusted in turn again.

No, our works never can satisfy God. His only-begotten Son tells us, that when we have "done all those things which are commanded us, we must say that we are unprofitable servants²." And every one's experience tells him, that the more exact he becomes in the obedience of holiness, so much the sharper his eye becomes to his own faults; the more he does, so much the more he finds that he has left undone: in matters of the next world, as of this, it is ignorance only that is ever self-satisfied. Our very faith, if it be faith, will prevent us from trusting to our works; for, as St. James says, "Faith works with our works," namely, by prompting them, directing them, and being exercised by them. But that very faith sets us immediately under the eye of God, and therefore puts those works under his searching scrutiny; and how can they endure that? Faith sets before us the perfect example of Christ; and where shall a man take his stand in comparison of that? Faith leads us

² Luke xvii. 10.

to the foot of the cross of Christ ; and what can the man claim for himself who sees what was done for him there ? So utterly is all boasting excluded.

And now what remains but to thank God in Jesus Christ our Lord, for having appointed our places in a Church where this doctrine, on which all depends, is taught in all its scriptural purity ? Let us hold fast our profession, without wavering, and show our faith by our works ; let it not be a mere sentiment in us, as it was in those whom St. James reproveth, in whom it never worked by love, but let it be a living, operating principle within us, daily growing more stedfast, daily more clear, daily more active to work, thus affording a dwelling-place to Christ in the heart ; and this, under God's Holy Spirit, we shall do by putting to account, through faithful prayer, and growing knowledge of his Word, the various talents of our stewardship. So we shall be prepared to see the things unseen, and to dwell amid the things eternal.

THE END.

SALAR JUNG MUSEUM LIBRARY

(Occidental Section)

Unless the book is returned on or before the due date given below, a fine of 6 nP. will be charged for each day.

