

## Lecture XX.

### God's Works Of Providence

Rom. xi. 36.—“For of him, and through him, and to him are all things, to whom be glory for ever, Amen.”—Psal. ciii. 19.—“The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens and his kingdom ruleth over all.”—Matt. x. 29.—“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.”

There is nothing more commonly confessed in words, than that the providence of God reaches to all the creatures and their actions, but I believe there is no point of religion so superficially and slightly considered by the most part of men. The most part ponder none of these divine truths. There is nothing above their senses which is the subject of their meditations. And for the children of God, I fear many do give such truths of God too common and coarse entertainment in their minds. I know not what we are taken up with in this age,—with some particular truths more remote from the knowledge of others in former times, or some particular cases concerning ourselves? You will find the most part of Christians stretch not their thoughts beyond their own conditions or interests, or some particular questions about faith and repentance, &c. And in the mean time the most weighty points of religion, which have been the subject of the meditation and admiration of saints in all ages, are wholly laid aside through a misapprehension of their commonness as if a man would despise the sun and the air, and prefer some rare piece of stone or timber to them. Certainly, as in the disposal of the world, the Lord hath in great wisdom and goodness made the most needful and useful things most common—those without which

man cannot live are always obvious to us, so that if any thing be more rare, it is not necessary—so in this universe of religion, he in mercy and wisdom hath so framed all, that those points of truth and belief which are most near the substance of salvation and necessary to it, and most fit to exercise us in true godliness,—these are everywhere to be found, partly engraven on men's hearts, partly set down most clearly and often in scripture, that a believing soul can look nowhere but it must breathe in that air of the gospel, and look upon that common Sun of righteousness, God the Creator, and the healing Sun, Christ the Redeemer, shining everywhere in scripture. The general providence of God and the special administration of Christ the Saviour, these are common, and these are essential to our happiness. Therefore the meditation of Christians should run most upon them, and not always about some particular questions or debates of the time. It is a strange thing how people should be more affected with a discourse on the affairs of the time, or on some inward thoughts of their own hearts, than if one should speak of God's universal kingdom over all men and nations. That is accounted a general and ordinary discourse, even as if men would set at nought the sun's light, because it shines to all, and every day, or would despise the water, because it may be found everywhere. Let the sun be removed for some few days, and O what would the world account of it beyond all your curious devices or rare enjoyments! This is it which would increase to more true godliness, if rightly believed, than many other things ye are busied withal. It is our general view of them makes them but general. I spoke once upon this word, Rom. xi. 36, but only in reference to the end of man, which is God's glory, but the words do extend further, and we must now consider what further they hold forth. The apostle hath been speaking of the Lord's unsearchable ways and judgments towards men in the dispensation of grace and salvation, how free and how absolute he is in that. And this he strengthens by the supreme wisdom of God, who did direct him. Why dost thou, O

man, take upon thee to direct him now? For, where was there any counsellor when he alone contrived all the frame of this world, and then, by sovereign highness and supremacy over the creatures, disposed of them? For he is a debtor to none, therefore none can quarrel him for giving or not giving, for who was it that gave him first, for which he should give a recompense? Was there any could prevent him with a gift? Nay, none could, saith he, “for of him, and through him, and to him are all things” and therefore he must prevent men. For from whence should that gift of the creature, which could oblige him, have its rise? It must be of God, if it be a creature, and therefore he is in no man's common, he must give it ere we have it to give him again.

The words are most comprehensive. They comprehend all things, and that is very large. There is nothing without this compass, and they comprehend all the dependence of things. Things depend upon that which made them, that which preserves them, and that for which they are made. All things depend on him as their producing cause that gives them a being, “for of him are all things.” They also depend on him as their conserving cause, who continues their being by that selfsame influence wherewith he gave it, “for through him are all things.” And then they depend on him as their final cause, for whose glory they are and are continued, for, “to him are all things.” Thus you have the beginning, the continuance, and the end of the whole creation. This word may lead us through all, from God, as the beginning, the alpha and original of their being, through God, as the only supporter, confirmer and upholder of their being, and unto God, as the very end for which they have their being. Now, to travel within this compass,—to walk continually within this circle, and to go along this blessed round—to begin at God, and to go along all our way with him, till we arrive and end at God,—and thus to do continually in the journey of meditation, when it surveys any of his works—this were, indeed, the very proper work, and the special happiness man was created for, and,

I may say, a great part of that which a Christian is created for. Again, there would be nothing more powerful to the conforming of a soul to God, and to his obedience and fear than this, to have that persuasion firmly rooted in the heart—that of God “are all things,” that whatever it be, good or evil that befalls us or others,—whatever we observe in the world, that is the subject of the thoughts and discourses of men, and turns men's eyes after them—that all that is of God, that is, it is in the world, it started out of nothing at his command, it is, because his power gave it a being, and in this consideration to overlook, and in a manner forget, all second causes, to have such affecting and uptaking thoughts of the first principle of all these motions, as to regard the lower wheels, that are next us, no more than the hand or the sword that a man strikes us with as if these second causes had no influence of their own but were merely acted and moved by this supreme power, as if God did nothing by them, but only at their presence. We should so labour to look on those things he doth by creatures, as if he did them alone without the creatures, as if he were this day creating a world. Certainly, the solid faith of God's providence will draw off the covering of the creature, and espy the secret almighty power which acts in every thing to bring forth his good pleasure concerning them. And then to consider, with that same seriousness of meditation that the same everlasting arm which made them, is under them to support them, that the most noble and excellent creatures are but streams, rays, images and shadows of God's majesty, which, as they have their being by derivation, so they have then continuance by that same continued influence, so that if he would interpose between himself and them, or withdraw his countenance, or stop his influence, the most sufficient of them all should vanish, as the sun beams dry up the streams of a fountain, and disappear as the image of the glass, Psal. civ. 29, 30. O that place were a pertinent object of a Christian's meditation, how much of God is to be pressed out of it by a serious pondering of it! “Thou hidest thy face, they

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are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created.” It is even with the very being and faculties of the creature as with the image in the glass, which, when the face removes, it is seen no more. The Lord, as it were, breathes into them a being, and when he takes in his breath they perish, and when he sends it out again they are renewed. We do not wonder at the standing of the world, but think, if we had been witnesses of the making of it, we would have been filled with admiration. But certainly it is only our stupidity that doth not behold that same wonder continued, for what is the upholding of this by his power but a very continued and repeated creation,—which influence were able to bring a world out of nothing? If this had not been before the virtue and power he employs now in making them subsist, that same alone, without any addition of power, would have in the beginning made all thus to be of nothing, so that the continuance of the world is nothing else but an uninterrupted and constant flux and emanation of these things from God, as of light from the body of the sun. And then to meditate how all these things are for him and his glory, though we know no use nor end of them, yet that his majesty hath appointed them to show forth, one way or other, the glory of his name in them, and those things which to our first and foolish apprehensions seem most contrary to him, and, as it were, to spread a cloud of darkness over his glorious name—the sins and perverse doings of men and angels, the many disorders and confusions in the world, which seem to reflect some way upon him, that yet he hath holy and glorious ends in them all, yea, that himself is the end of all, I say, to meditate on these things till our soul received the stamp of reverence, and fear, and faith in God,—this would certainly be the most becoming exercise of a Christian, to bring all things down from God, that we might return and ascend with all things again unto God.

This is the most suitable employment of a man, as reasonable,

much more as a Christian, that very duty he was created for. "This people have I formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise," Isa. xliii. 21. And this is the showing forth of his praise, to follow forth the footsteps of God in the word and in the world, and to ponder these paths of divine power and goodness and wisdom, and to acknowledge him with our heart in all these. He made many creatures on which his glory and praise is showed forth, and he made this creature man to show forth that praise and that glory which is showed forth in other creatures. O but this is a divine office! It is strange how our hearts are carried forth towards base things, and busied in many vain, impertinent, and base employments and scarce ever mind this great one we were created for.

Certainly, this is the employment we were made for, to deduce all things from God till we can again reduce all to him with glory, to bring all down from his everlasting counsels, until we send all up to his eternal glory, together with the sacrifice of our hearts, to behold all things to be of him, that is, of his eternal counsel and decree.—to have their rise in the bosom of that, and then, through him, to proceed out of the bosom of his decree and purpose, by his power, *quasi obstetricante potentia*, and then to return with all the promise and glory to his ever glorious name, "for whom are all things." There is none but they will allow God some government in the world. Some would have him as a king, commanding and doing all by deputies and substitutes. Some would have his influence general, like the sun's upon sublunary things, but how shallow are all men's thoughts in regard of that which is? God has prepared, indeed, his throne in the heavens. That is true, that his glory doth manifest itself in some strange and majestic manner above, but the whole tenor of Scripture shows that he is not shut up in heaven, but that he immediately cares for, governs, and disposes all things in the world, for his kingdom is over all. It is the weakness of kings, not their glory, that they have need of deputies, it is his glory, not baseness, to

look to the meanest of his creatures. It is a poor resemblance and empty shadow that kings have of him, he rules in the kingdoms of men, and to him belongs the dominion and the glory. He deserves the name of a king, whose beck heaven and earth obey. Can a king command that the sea flow not? Can a parliament act and ordain that the sun rise not? Or will these obey them? Yet at his decree and command the sun is dark, the sea stands still, the mountains tremble; “at thy rebuke the sea fled.” Alas! what do we mean that we look upon creatures, and act ourselves as if we were independent in our being and moving? How many things fall out and you call them casual and attribute them to fortune? How many things do the world gaze upon, think upon, and discourse upon, and yet not one thought, one word of God all the time? What more contingent than the falling of a sparrow on the ground? And yet even that is not unexpected to him, but it flows from his will and counsel. What less taken notice of or known than the hairs of your head? Yet these are particularly numbered by him, and so that no power in the world can add to them or diminish from them without his counsel. O what would the belief of this do to raise our hearts to suitable thoughts of God above the creatures, to increase the fear, faith, and love of God, and to abate from our fear of men, and our vain and unprofitable cares and perplexities? How would you look upon the affairs of men,—the counsels, contrivances, endeavours, and successes of men,—when they are turning things upside down, and plotting the ruin of his people, and establishing themselves alone in the earth? What would you think of all these revolutions at this time? Many souls are astonished at them, and stand gazing at what is done and to be done. And this is the very language of your spirits and ways. The Lord hath forsaken the earth, the Lord seeth not. This is the language of our parliaments and people. They do imagine that they are doing their own business and making all sure for themselves. But, O what would a soul think that could escape above them all, and arise up to the first wheel of present

motions! A soul that did stand upon the exalted tower of the word of God, and looked off it by the prospect of faith, would presently discover the circle in which all these wanderings and changes are confined, and see men, states, armies, nations, and all of them doing nothing but turning about in a round, as a horse in a mill, from God's eternal purpose, by his almighty power, to his unspeakable glory. You might behold all these extravagant motions of the creatures, inclosed within those limits, that they must begin here, and end here, though themselves are so beastly that they neither know of whom nor for whom their counsels and actions are. Certainly, Satan cannot break without this compass, to serve his own humour. Principalities and powers cannot do it. If they will not glorify him, he shall glorify himself by them, and upon them.