

SERMON X.

CHRIST'S VICTORY AND TRIUMPH OVER PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS.

COLLOSS. ii. 15.—“And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”

IN the eighth verse of this chapter, the apostle states the controversy betwixt himself and some false brethren, who, he heard, had risen in the church at Colosse, and reduces it to three heads; principles of abused philosophy, superstitious and foolish rites, which were merely the inventions of men, and the Mosaic ceremonies, abolished by the death of Christ. He argues against them all, by showing that Christ is a most complete Saviour; having no less than the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him, and consequently such as are in him must be complete, as to every thing necessary for their salvation. In the eleventh verse and downwards, he reasons more particularly against the Mosaic ceremonies, especially circumcision, which, it seems, was at that time urged, as essential to salvation. His argument against it is this: believers have in Christ the thing signified by that ordinance, viz., the circumcision of the heart; which consists in putting off the body of sin flowing from original corruption. And he amplifies this argument by showing, that we have not only the thing signified, but also the external seal, viz., baptism, which is more expressive of the grace of God than circumcision was.

He shows further, that they had no need of circumcision in the flesh, because they had in Christ all that was necessary for justification as well as for sanctification; God hav-

ing given them the pardon of their sins through Christ, when they were uncircumcised, being Gentiles. Having mentioned the grace of God in forgiving their trespasses, in the next verse, he assigns the ground of this remission in the fourteenth verse; "Blotting out the hand writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross."

The law, as a covenant of works, and the law as appendaged with ceremonial ordinances, was cancelled by the blood of Christ; taken out of the way, and nailed to his cross. The obligatory bond of the law, unto which the sentence of every man's conscience against himself was a subscription, and unto which the Jews did subscribe, in a special manner, by their ceremonial observances, was, by the death of Christ, torn in pieces. What madness then must it be to renew that obligation, by observing the ceremonial law!

The text is an amplification of this argument, whereby the apostle shows, that a full and complete salvation is purchased for us, by the death of Christ.

Believers, by that death, are not only freed from every thing that could militate against them in law, but they are also delivered from the power of such enemies, as rule over them by force or violence. "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

He had said before, that the obligatory bond of the law was nailed to the cross of Christ. He adds now, that in and by the same cross, Satan, with all his auxiliaries, our spiritual enemies, are spoiled and triumphed over. And after one is assured of all this, what does he need more? what has he more to fear? is there any need for men to make an addition to such a complete Saviour? In these words, (1.) you have an account of a great victory which our Lord Jesus Christ obtained. And here notice, first the parties over whom he was victorious. They are designated by the pompous titles of principalities and powers, that is evil angels, Satan, and the whole

apostate tribes. He calls them principalities and powers, because of the power which they have over men, in consequence of their sin. They have no natural right and power over men; but when men by sin had cast off their allegiance to God, they were judicially given over to the vassalage and slavery of Satan, the head of the apostate tribe: And the power which he has over them, while they continue his subjects, is great and extensive. Some think also that the title of principalities and powers intimates, that there are different ranks and orders among the bad angels.

(2.) Notice the kind of victory which Christ obtained over these principalities and powers. It was not a destroying them out of hand, as to their simple being: no; Satan and the powers of darkness exist to this very day, and shall exist for ever. The victory then consisted in spoiling these enemies of God and men. Christ spoiled Satan of all his power, armour, and riches. He was dispossessed of the spoil which he took up, and proudly boasted of, when Adam fell. The original word, here rendered spoiled, properly signifies to strip or make naked, and carries a manifest allusion to the custom of conquerors, who used to strip the conquered of their armour, and hang it upon a pillar, which they frequently erected in the very place, where the victory was won. Thus Christ having obtained the victory over Satan, stripped him of all his weapons, and hung them for a trophy upon his cross: so that when the Jews fixed the cross of Christ in the ground, to make it stand erect, they raised a pillar, though they knew it not, on which Satan's whole armour was hung up and exposed to public view.

(3.) In these words you have Christ's triumph over the conquered. "He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them," or triumphed them, as it is in the original; that is to say, led them in triumph. Still there is a manifest allusion to the custom of conquerors in their triumphs. The heads or chief men of the conquered party, were taken and bound in chains by two and two, or more;

and in this disgraceful manner they went sometimes before, and sometimes behind the triumphal chariot of the conqueror: and this tragical scene was always beheld by a vast crowd of people, for the honour of the victors, and for the shame of the captives.

Thus Christ having conquered Satan, with all the powers of darkness, led him in triumph, and exposed him before God and all the holy angels, as an enemy conquered and made captive. But of this again.

In the last place, observe, when and where all this was done. Why, it was at the death and upon the cross of Christ. Even when and where Satan thought to have had the day, by putting to death the innocent Jesus, were he and all his powers conquered and triumphed over, by the Lord of life, to their eternal shame and mortification. The words rendered *in it*, refer the victory and triumph to the cross, whereof the apostle had been speaking, in the preceding verse.

DOCTRINE. Christ having, by his death upon the cross, obtained the victory over Satan, with all the powers of darkness, led them in open triumph.

In discoursing on this subject, I shall, first, speak of the victory which Christ obtained over Satan: secondly, of the triumph; and then make some improvement of what is said.

In speaking of the victory which Christ obtained over Satan, I shall, first, show the ground of the quarrel betwixt them. Secondly, how Christ obtained the victory over him by his death upon the cross. Thirdly, I shall name some properties of this victory.

I return to the first thing proposed, viz. To show the ground of the quarrel betwixt Christ and Satan: for, as victory supposes a war going before, so a war must be founded upon some quarrel, upon some offence given or received, either real or imaginary.

The ground of the quarrel, then, was twofold. *First*, Satan, with his angels, left their first habitation and fell, Jude 6 ver. Their being said to have left it seems to in-

timate their dissatisfaction with it. They were not pleased with their condition, though it was the same with those angels who stood, therefore they left it, and set up for themselves, in opposition to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The apostle Peter says, they sinned. Now consider what a terrible thing it was to set an affront upon God, in his highest court; to sin against him even in heaven, the place where he dwells, and you will soon and easily perceive a sufficient foundation for a quarrel against them: even a quarrel to be eternally pursued. They were the first inventors and founders of that evil thing called sin, which is the very opposite of God and all good. And if it be true which is alleged by some, that the point of their first sin was directed against the Son of God, as he was to be manifested in man's nature, then certainly it became Christ, in a special manner, to avenge the quarrel.

Secondly, Satan, the head of the apostate spirits, betrayed our first parents into sin, by which the covenant between God and man was broken, and the whole world brought in guilty before God, Gen. iii. 4, 5. He misrepresented God unto man, and he continues to do so still. He also misrepresents man unto God; for as is his name, so is his nature and practice. He is the devil, the calumniator, the malignant, and the very fire-brand of the whole creation of God. He brought two things into the world, which were solely his own, for they are essentially opposite to the nature and works of God: these were sin and death. He brought sin, that ugly monster, into the very garden where God had placed the man; and from thence he sent it out into the wide world, where it has remained for about six thousand years; and to this very day God is not able to look upon it. Then he introduced death into the world: that is not of God's making either. Death is of a heterogeneous nature. Hence the apostle, Rom. v. 12. tells us, that it entered by sin: it entered in at the same crevice with sin, and by the same hand, viz. Satan. And now we may easily imagine, what joy and satisfaction the malignant spirit, with his tribe, would have at the thought

of having ushered sin and death into God's dominion. When God looked at first upon his own works, he was well pleased, because they were all very good: so, when Satan looked upon sin and death, the works which he had made, he was, to be sure, also well pleased. He would boast and triumph like a Nebuchadnezzar, saying, this I have done for the honour of my majesty, and for the support of my kingdom, in opposition to God.

Here then you will easily perceive a broad foundation for a second quarrel, a quarrel of a public nature, for the first was personal; but this was public, inasmuch as the sons of men were concerned in it; and therefore Christ avenged it in our nature, and in our name, as our public head and representative. While the proud apostate was triumphing, while he was defying the honour and armies of the living God, one combatant, a match, and more for him, appears upon the field, and proclaims war against him and his seed, Gen. iii. 15. As this war was soon proclaimed, so it was instantly and constantly carried on: so that among the first sons which Adam had, there was a parting of the seeds; God got Abel, Satan got Cain, and so it went on from father and son on both sides, through the several periods of the church, till at length God incarnate came upon the field, and in his own person fought Satan, and obtained a complete victory over him, while himself seemed to be overcome. And this leads me to the second thing proposed, which was to show how Christ obtained the victory over Satan, by his death upon the cross.

First, There was a divine appointment in the death of Christ, to spoil Satan with all his auxiliaries, Heb. ii. 14. 1 John iii. 8. It was the great design of his enemies to get him put to death, and especially the death of the cross: for then, to be sure, they thought they would have done with him, he would trouble them no more; and his going out of the world in such a disgraceful manner, would make his name hateful to mankind. And no doubt Satan promised himself great things, with respect to the promoting and securing the interests of his kingdom, if he could get

Christ put to the death of the cross. To believe in one who was crucified, was a stumbling block to the Jews; and to look for salvation from a crucified man, appeared a most ridiculous fancy to the Gentiles. But behold with wonder the height and the depth of the manifold wisdom of God, whose ways are not as man's ways! By this determination and appointment, the dead man, nay, the crucified man, pulls down Satan's whole fabric about his ears. The shameful despised cross, having the wisdom and power of God in it, is made a pillar to hang up Satan's armour on; a triumphal chariot, behind which he, with all his auxiliaries, must be dragged in chains: the Father and friends of the crucified Jesus, looking on all the while, rejoicing. Thus you see the force of a divine appointment: it can break through and baffle the wisdom of men and devils: it can strengthen the spoiled against the strong: it can bring glory out of shame, life out of death, and victory out of conquest.

Secondly, Christ, by his death upon the cross, took away sin, and delivered the elect from death, whereof Satan had the power: and hereby he was conquered and his spoil taken from him. He is the Lamb of God, who took away the sin of the world. From whence does Satan get the pompous title of God of this world? Why, he derives it from sin and death, upon which his kingdom was erected, and by which it stands. If then the two pillars be removed by a mighty one, the whole superstructure falls to the ground. His kingdom is departed from him. Now as to the first of these pillars, namely, sin, Christ brake it down, inasmuch as by his death upon the cross he fully satisfied the demands of the broken law, which was the strength of that pillar: "for the strength of sin is the law." And as for the other pillar, viz. death, it must necessarily fall upon the removal of the former, which is the strength and sting of it. Moreover, Christ, by his own death, is said to have swallowed it up in victory; and he will pursue that victory, till there shall not be such a thing as death in all his dominions. Now, if by the merit and power of Christ's

death, the elect world be delivered from sin in its guilt, dominion, and being, and from death in its sting, are they not delivered from Satan? where is his authority over them? is not his sceptre taken away? and is he not a conquered enemy?

Thirdly, Satan was spoiled by the death of Christ, through the imminent hand which he had all along, in bringing about this death. For understanding what I mean, you will observe, that Satan, by presuming to tempt Christ, and by his hatching and contriving the death of Christ, forfeited all his authority and power over men; and that being forfeited, he is a spoiled enemy.

Satan's power over men was given him by way of commission from God, for the punishment of sin. And as every commission has its limitations, which being broken through, the commission is forfeited, so had this commission of Satan. It was confined to sinners; and therefore if he meddled with one who was not a sinner, he exceeded the bounds of his commission, and so it became forfeit. Now, the devil not only set upon a man who was not a sinner, but upon the Son of God himself. He attacked him in the wilderness, and being repulsed, had the impudence to renew his temptation: and it would seem he tempted him frequently. He stirred up the people against him. He entered into the heart of Judas, one of his disciples, by whom he was betrayed. And at the death of Christ, the powers of darkness, by the divine permission, set upon him, and did their utmost, but were foiled. The holy and just God, by this method, took the wise in their own craftiness. He suffered Satan to fall into the blunder of meddling with Christ, and carrying on his death, that he might forfeit his power over men, and so be spoiled of all, by that very thing which he thought would be an absolute security for all.

Fourthly, The death of Christ was the completing part of the work of redemption; and so was, as it were, the fatal stroke to Satan. When a man receives one blow after another, till he fall, the last blow is said to kill him. So

it was here. Christ gave Satan many blows and bruises in his life; but those which he gave him at the last were the fatal ones. Many a blow he gave him in the midst of his boasting over fallen man. That was one, the promise of the seed of the woman to bruise his head. When he proclaimed war against him at his incarnation he gave him another; and many more in the days of his flesh; yet for all these he would not be quiet, but came often unto him. Therefore when he came to the place where he was to die, he took that very cross which Satan had prepared for him, and with its mighty force dashed out his brains, bruised him and trod him like mortar; while Satan, with all his power, could not break one bone of him. All this Christ did in the name of his people, as their head and representative.

I proceed now to mention some properties of this victory which Christ obtained. And,

First, It was a very dear-bought victory. Victories are not gained without wounds and blood on both sides. So it was here. Precious blood, even the blood of the Son of God was shed in the field of battle, and yet not one drop of it was lost: nay, the conqueror himself died, and yet he obtained the victory. The prince of life was killed, that principalities and powers might be spoiled. Surely the spoils which he distributes among believers, whom he allowed to remain at home, should be highly valued, since they were purchased at no less expense than the life and blood of a divine Redeemer.

Secondly, It was a righteous victory. "If a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned except he strive lawfully." Christ's conquest was not an unjust one, like many of the conquests gained by the heroes and potentates of the world. Alexander, and the Cæsars of old, conquered countries, cities and kingdoms, taking the spoil to themselves, while they had no just right to it, but only wanted to aggrandise themselves, and purchase a fame for heroic achievements, that might last in the world while they themselves were gone; but the Captain of our salvation

made no unjust conquest over Satan and the powers of darkness, for they detained his lawful subjects in captivity : was it not righteous then to deliver them ?

Lastly, It was a most glorious victory. Never was there a victory attended with so great glory to the conqueror, and with so great shame to the conquered. Had Satan, with his auxiliaries, been spoiled by holy angels, he might have alleged that he met with his match ; or had he been spoiled by a mere act of omnipotence, he might have boasted that he had put God to his utmost : but to be conquered by the human nature, at which he had a particular spite, and which was lower than his own, to fall by a man, by a dying man, a crucified man, a dead man ! what everlasting shame and mortification was this ! Moreover, as Satan prevailed over men by an act of subtilty, so Christ prevailed against him, not by a mere act of power, but by righteousness and wisdom ; for had he been to have prevailed by power, there was no occasion to assume the human nature.

I come now to speak to Christ's triumph upon this victory. The question is, whether the expression in the text is merely figurative, or if there was a real triumph over the principalities and powers of darkness, by exposing them as conquered enemies, and that too, in a most public manner before God, before all the holy angels, and perhaps before the spirits of just men made perfect. I go in with the last, for the following reasons :

First, The original words in the text, by which the triumph is expressed, intimate the reality of it. The word rendered to make a "shew," is the same with that in Matt. i. 19. which is rendered to make a public example. Moreover, in Num. xxv. 4. when Moses was commanded to take the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, the Septuagint translates the Hebrew word for hanging them up, by the same word with that in our text. Again, the word rendered "openly," signifies in the sight of others, and in the most public manner.

Secondly, The devil and his angels, being intelligent creatures, were capable of being really exposed and put

openly to shame, when defeated in their designs. And therefore, to object that the allusion in our text must be explained, as that in the preceding verse with respect to the law, is not solid: for sin and the law are not persons, but things, and so not capable of being put to shame; but it is evidently otherwise in this case.

And to add no more. The nature and end of a triumph in war, unto which there is a manifest allusion here, leads to this sense. A triumph was always celebrated openly before a multitude; nay, often there were some who shouted all the way, victory, victory; and all this for the honour of the victor, and the shame of the captives: so that if a triumph was carried on privately, it was contrary to its nature, and lost the end of its institution.

I pass on to the application.

Is it so, that Jesus Christ, having by his death on the cross "spoiled principalities and powers, made a shew of them openly?" Then, in the *first* place, all who fight under Satan, are conquered with him. When a king or general falls in the field of battle, all his supporters fall with him, and are said to be conquered. So Christ having spoiled Satan upon the cross, did at that very instant reach a deadly blow to every one of his supporters. Hence, the law's obligatory bond upon you, believers, was nailed to the cross. The old man of sin was crucified with him. The world was conquered. Death was swallowed up in victory. And, in a word, everything that could militate for Satan against the saints, was removed out of the way.

Secondly, Christians have no ground to be ashamed of the cross of Christ; but, on the contrary, to boast and glory in it. The God of glory having spoiled Satan upon the cross, and made it a chariot of triumph after the victory, has removed the reproach of it, and made it truly honourable. Therefore, believers, while the carnal noisy world are boasting loudly, some in their wisdom, some in their strength, others in their wealth, let your boasting be all the day-long in the cross of Christ. Faith's views of the conqueror, faith's views of the cross as the field of

battle, and the triumphal chariot, will furnish you with the most noble grounds of boasting. Besides, the dignity and honour of Christ's cross should make you boast in your own; for by it Christ puts honour upon you before the world, angels, and men. Hereby he conforms you to himself: and is it not honour to be conformed to him? As he conquered Satan, notwithstanding his cross, nay, by his cross, so he will lead you forth into the field of battle, compassed about with infirmities, pained and borne down with the weight of the cross, and yet you shall return triumphant, even as he did.

Thirdly, By this victory and this triumph, Christ's name is rendered famous for ever. His name, says David, "shall last as the sun." Time has buried the remembrance of persons and events, and especially victories, which once a day made a mighty noise in the world, and that too, in spite of every means used to perpetuate the remembrance of them. The marble pillars, the statues and monuments, by which the potentates of the world hoped to immortalise their memory, are gone to ruins, as well as their founders. But behold, here is a conqueror and a conquest, the remembrance of both which has been kept up in the world for many hundreds of years, and will be kept up when time shall be no more: nay, it will not end with time, but continue through eternity. To preserve the memory of this victory, the Lord's supper is instituted. If therefore those who are strangers to our commonwealth and covenant of promise, ask us what we mean by covering a sacramental table, and sitting down at it; the answer is at hand; it is to perpetuate the famous name of the man Jesus, the Son of God, who, more than seventeen hundred years ago, being nailed hands and feet upon a cross, baffled all the powers of hell.

Fourthly, No wonder that Satan and wicked men are enemies to the cross. The spirits of the conquered party cannot miss to be ruffled and filled with spite against the conqueror. How must the revengeful and proud spirit of Satan be galled and tortured at the thoughts of his being

foiled by the cross of Christ, which he reckoned could secure all? how great must the fretting and anguish of his spirit be? shall we wonder then, that he and his have done, and are still doing to this day what they can, to ruin the reputation of the cross?

Fifthly, Believers, here is great encouragement for you in opposing Satan, and all your spiritual enemies. They are conquered already by the Captain of your salvation. They have all got such a deadly bruise by the cross, that they shall not be able to overcome you. Christ, indeed, could have bruised them so, that they should not have been able to make the least motion against you; but for the glory of his grace, and for the greater mortification of the prince of darkness, he will have him overthrown and trodden upon by the weakest child in all his family. Resist him then, believers, and all his accomplices, as knowing, that every degree of resistance is a degree of conquest over him. And mind always to exercise faith in the death of Christ, as the most effectual means of opposing him. Let faith present the cross of Christ to him, and he will flee from you ashamed.

Lastly, Enemies of Christ, subject yourselves to him. Join this glorious conqueror. Why do you run against the thick bosses of the buckler of the Almighty? why do you harden yourselves against him? do you imagine you can do so, and prosper? Nay, if you will not bow before him, you shall be broken on the wheel of divine vengeance: therefore desert the enemy's camp this day, and give your hearty consent to have your names registered in Christ's muster-roll: throw away the weapons of rebellion, and take unto you the whole armour of God, so shall you at length be conquerors over sin, Satan, death, and hell.