

believing firmly, that it is sufficient to purge you from all sin ; and in this way come forward to the Lord with holy boldness, under the covert of this blood.—Once more, shake off all worldly thoughts and affections : labour to be in a heavenly frame ; the nobles left the crowd at the foot of the hill, and went up into the mount. Put off your shoes, when you come on this holy ground.—Still farther, come forward under a due sense of the command of God ; they went up because they were called, and so must you from conscience of Christ's command : “Do this in remembrance of me.” Labour to have the sense of this command increased upon your spirits, as necessary to produce suitable obedience.—Lastly, open the eyes of faith, and look ; the mouth of faith and eat what is set before your soul there, a slain Saviour, with all his benefits. Amen.

GOSPEL PRIVILEGES WONDERS OF GRACE

S E R M O N I X .

Exod. xxiv. 11,

And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand : also they saw God, and did eat and drink.

HAVING, in the preceding discourse, considered the first doctrine taken from these words, we go on to a short illustration of

DOCTRINE II. That it is a wonder of grace, that sinful creatures, in their solemn approaches to God, are favoured with special sights of, and an holy familiarity with him, and yet come off safe.

In speaking to this point, we shall,

I. Shew that it is a wonder of grace, that sinful creatures are admitted to see God, and to be familiar with him.

II. Shew that it is a wonder that in their solemn approaches, and when they are thus favoured, yet they come off safe.

III. Explain how it comes to pass, that their safety, when thus favoured, is secured.—And then,

IV. Make some short improvement.

We are,

I. To shew that it is a wonder of grace that sinful creatures are admitted to see God, and be familiar with him. We think we need say little for proof of this. Only consider,

1. The infinite distance that there is between God and the creature in respect of perfection. The distance betwixt an angel and a

moth is but finite ; but betwixt God and us the distance is infinite. And therefore, no wonder that beholding the glorious perfections of God, we dwindle into nothing in our own eyes, and say with Abraham, Gen. xviii. 27, " Behold now, we have taken upon us to speak unto the Lord, which are but dust and ashes ;" and cry out with Solomon, 1 Kings viii. 27, " But will God indeed dwell on the earth ? behold, the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee ; how much less this house that I have builded ?" Remember, ye saints that though God has laid by his enmity, he retains his sovereignty over us ; and therefore it is admirable condescension, that he is pleased to allow us to see him, and to enjoy holy familiarity with him. Consider,

2. That it is the same God who is such a severe and dreadful avenger of sin ; Psalm v. 5, " The foolish shall not stand in thy sight : thou hatest all workers of iniquity." Hab. i. 13, " Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." This same God who allows his covenant-people a sight of his glory, and a holy familiarity with him on the mount of ordinances, is he who thrust Adam out of paradise,—drowned the old world,—rained fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah. He who gives some the cup of salvation at his table, is the same who makes others of their fellow-creatures drink the wine-cup of his fury. He who makes some feast in his presence, is the same from whose presence others shall be punished with everlasting destruction.

We are,

II. To show that it is a wonder of grace that sinful creatures, in their solemn approaches to God, and when they are thus favoured, come off safe. This will appear if we consider,

1. The infinite holiness and spotless purity of that God before whom the sinful creature appears. He is glorious in holiness, and fearful in praises, Exod. xv. 11. Even angelical purity is dim in his light, and is a sort of impurity, when compared with the infinite holiness of God, Job xv. 15. Even they are chargeable with folly in his sight ; potential folly, (though not actual), a kind of imperfection inseparable from the nature of the creature, in any state whatsoever ; Job iv. 18, " Behold, he put no trust in his servants ; and all his angels are charged with folly." (*Hebrew*, He puts, chargeth). And therefore, even the confirmed angels cover their feet with their wings, Isa. vi. 2, as if they would tell us that perfect created holiness is but a dark and smoky light before uncreated holiness. Shining holiness in some of the saints on earth, has a damping power with it. The very sight of one that convincingly walks close with God, is enough to strike a damp on the heart of a

loose professor or apostate. How much more may the sight of infinite holiness strike the most spiritual saints to the ground! Consider,

2. That the best carry a sinful nature even up into the mount with them. Paul, rapt up to the third heavens, brought a sinful nature down with him again, an evidence he had carried it up, 2 Cor. xii. 7. Look on thyself, O saint! in thy nearest approaches, and thou wilt see the humbling sight, a sinful heart, life, and lips, Isa. lxiv. 6; sin woven into thy very nature, and mixed with thy flesh and blood, making a vile body, Phil. iii. 21; sunk into the marrow of thy spirit, and diffused through thy whole soul. And then canst thou cease to say, as in Lam. iii. 22, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." Is it not a wonder of grace, that hell, so near heaven, has not sunk with its own weight? Consider,

3. That sinful creatures never miss to leave the marks of their foul feet, even when they are on holy ground. Rom. vii. 21 "I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me." Peter falls a-roving even on the mount, Luke ix. 33. Even in the greatest light which ever shone about the saints, they never wrote a line so fair, but there was a blot in it. The sacrifices were carried up to the mount with the nobles, for God knew they would need them even there. And if ye will look back to your carriage, when at a communion table, you will see such mismanagements, as may make you wonder that he laid not his hand upon you. Consider,

4. The particular jealousy which God has manifested about his worship. Therefore Joshua told the people, chap. xxiv. 19, "Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is an holy God: he is a jealous God: he will not forgive your transgressions, nor your sins." And he himself declared, "he would be sanctified in them that come nigh him, and before all the people he will be glorified," Lev. x. 3. And upon this he wrote a commentary, with flaming evidence, in the blood of Nadab and Abihu, even two of these on whom he laid not his hand at this time. A slip in the holy ground is most dangerous and provoking in its own nature. To affront a king in his palace, his presence-chamber, or on his throne, stirs up his anger with a peculiar keenness. How dear did the men of Bethshemesh pay for a look, 1 Sam. vi. 19; Uzzah, for a touch, 2 Sam. vi. 6, 7; Ananias and Sapphira, for a word, Acts v. Now, who is able to stand before the piercing eye of his jealousy? Is it not a wonder of his grace, that the fire of his indignation burns not up sinful creatures in their solemn approaches to him? Consider,

5. That there is a solemn awfulness about the very ordinances of

grace, which the sinner could not bear if he were not supported, Dan. x. 8, 9—19. Psalm lxviii. 35, "O God! thou art terrible out of thy holy places." Jacob understood this when he had one of the most comfortable sights which ever mortal had: Gen. xxviii. 17, "And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." The very throne of grace stands on justice and judgment, which are its habitation, Psalm lxxxix. 14. (*Hebrew*, its base); the covenant founded on blood, the blood of his own Son. All our mercies from the throne are dyed red in the blood of a Mediator. Thou canst not have a gracious look from the throne, but through the Redeemer's wounds; nor a pardon, but what is written with his blood. So that such sights are sufficient to make one faint away, if they are not supported by grace. Consider,

Lastly, That the emanations of the divine glory would overwhelm sinners, burst the earthen vessels, if a gracious God did not graciously support them. Some have felt this, when they have been made to cry to the Lord to hold his hand, for the earthen pitchers were able to hold no more. We know not what spirit we are of. It is our mercy we see but through a glass darkly, and not face to face now; for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, 1 Cor. xv. 50. The flesh and blood of a giant would not be able to bear that glory now. And therefore, it is observed as an instance of his goodness, Job xxvi. 9, "He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it."

We now go on,

III. To explain how it comes to pass that the safety of God's people, when thus favoured, is secured. It is so,

1. Because they are God's covenant-people by marriage with his Son. They are married to Christ, and the Son of the Father's bosom is their husband. He has all freedom in his Father's house, and so it cannot be a strange house to them. Where he sits, his spouse may stand safely at his hand: Psalm xlv. 9, "Upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir." They have freedom in the house of God, in the right of their Husband. He has brought them up into his chariot of the covenant; and this has access to drive up into the mount, while it procures all safety to those who are in it, "being paved with love," Song iii. 9, 10.

2. Because they come up under the covert of the Redeemer's blood, Heb. xii. 22—24. By faith, they have the propitiation, whereby God is atoned, and becomes their friend, Rom. iii. 25. The flesh of a slain Saviour is a sufficient screen from divine wrath, and his red garments from the canopy under which they may safely feast while on the mount. Their safety is secured,

3. Because God looks on them as in his own Son, and not as in themselves; and so after a sort he overlooks their infirmities: Numb. xxiii. 21, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel." He looked on them in Adam, their first representative, and so drove them out of his presence; but now he looks upon them in Christ as their head, and so brings them in again. And, O! but they look fair in him, each one resembles the son of a king. In Jesus they are complete, Col. ii. 10; Song iv. 7, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." They are safe,

4. Because, though they be unclean creatures, they come up into the mount, to bathe in the fountain opened there, for sin and for uncleanness, Zech. xiii. 1. They come to the blood of sprinkling. A physician will not drive away his patient, because his running sores drop in his chamber. I will bear with this, says he, for the poor man has come to get himself healed. Their safety is secured,

Lastly, Because it is the end of the covenant, to bring them to God. Jacob might well promise himself to see Joseph, when the waggons were come from him for that very end, to bring him to him, Gen. xlv. 27, 28. The covenant looks very very low, as low as the earth, to secure the believer's daily bread, Isa. xxxiii. 16. Nay, in the bowels of the earth, to bring forth his dead body, mouldered in ashes: "I am the God of Abraham." Nay, as low as hell: "And thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell," Psalm lxxxvi. 13. And it looks very high, to bring the believer up into the midst of the mount of enjoyment with God in ordinances, nay, to the top of the mount, to bring them to where the Lord of glory dwells, where they shall see him as he is: Isa. xxxiii. 17, "Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off."

It only remains, that,

IV. We make some improvement of this subject.

1. Let us, then, never more think lightly of solemn approaches to God, whether in private or in public ordinances. O! it is sad to think of our rashness in venturing on holy duties, not considering that in these we sist ourselves in the awful presence of God: Eccl. v. 1, "Keep thy foot when thou goest into the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools." Whenever we are to go to God, we should consider where we are going, put off our shoes, for the place is holy. Were we thus frequently exercised, we would have more access to God in our ordinary approaches.

2. Let this commend Christ and the covenant to us, especially to those who stand off from him and his covenant. It is in the Mediator the sinner may meet with God in peace; for Jesus is our

peace, Eph. ii. 14. It is within the bond of the covenant, he is safe from avenging wrath. There is no safety without it, God will be a consuming fire to all who live and die out of Christ and the covenant.

Hearken, ye careless spectators, and be wise at length. Are you resolved to have no part in Christ and the covenant, that ye keep so far from the place of his feet, and the seal of his covenant. Consider, you also must come before God. You must die and come before the tribunal. Could you secure yourselves a place to be mere onlookers, when the rest of the world are dying about you; and when the world shall stand before the judgment-seat, then perhaps you might be allowed to be mere spectators on such an occasion as this. But it will not be so. You must take your part with the rest. And what will it be to get the first sight of your Judge then, with whom you might have been accepted, but would not? Consider, if it be a matter of such awful solemnity to approach the throne of grace, what will it be to stand before the throne of avenging justice? If it be so solemn to come up into mount Zion, where communion is to be had with God in Christ, what will it be to come to mount Sinai, where there is such blackness, darkness, and tempest, as will confound the adversaries of the Lord? Bless not yourselves that you have not gone up into the mount, for monuments of justice you shall be, if you be not thus monuments of grace.—Consider, what madness is it to lift up the heel against God, the weight of whose hand can crush you as a moth. Would it not be your wisdom to lie down among the dust of his feet, to approach him through his Son, and in the way of his covenant, trembling, if so be that he may be pleased to stretch out the golden sceptre, and save your life? Nay, come forward yet, strive to take hold of an offered Christ and covenant. Let not his terrors deter you from him. As the lepers at the gate of Samaria did, so reason ye.

3. Let us praise him for this, that upon us he has not laid his hand; that we have not left a name to the place, Perez, from the Lord's making a breach upon us; but that we may set up a pillar here, and call it Ebenezer. There has been strange fire offered to the Lord here this day; wrong touches given to the ark; unworthy communicating, faithless, fearless, stupid, confused, and hypocritical managements; who dare say they have made no stumble on the mount? The bread and wine in the sacrament have as deep relative holiness as the ark had; but had spectators and communicants been taken up as hot for their profane looking to the one, as the men of Bethshemesh were for their looking to the other, there had been a sad sight among us ere now. Glory be to our gracious God, that on us he hath not laid his hand.

4. Let us long for that day which will put an end to our sinfulness, weakness, and imperfection, when we shall see him as he is, without any danger of sinning or suffering, which is far better, Phil. i. 23. It would be a token for good that we had seen the Lord, if we were now longing for that blessed day.

Lastly, Let us apply ourselves to the duties which a gracious God calls for at our hands.—And,

1. Is there any among us who have been admitted to an holy familiarity with God? Song i. 4. Then,—Wonder at the freeness of grace, and be thankful that ever the like of you should have come so far forward; 2 Sam. vii. 18, “Who am I, O Lord God! and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?”—Double your watch, and walk very softly, being careful to keep your nearness, Song iii. 5; Isa. xxxviii. 15.—If there be any special errand to the throne for yourselves, or for the church of God, as no doubt there is, strike in with this golden opportunity, and lay it before the Lord, Exod. xxiv. 8, 9.—Beware of being proud of your attainments. There is a hazard here; but when you see your peacock-feathers, remember they are borrowed, and look to your black feet, 2 Cor. xii. 7.—Lay your account with a storm, and be on your guard. If you have got a larger meal than others, it is not unlike you have more to do than they. But accept that kindly, and bless God who is beforehand with you, laying in the provision before he lays on the burden.

2. Is there any among us who have seen the God of Israel? Then walk as becomes those who have beheld his glory. Blessed are your eyes, for they see. But here some may say, Alas! this sight has been withheld from my eyes.—In answer to such, I observe, that some saying this, no doubt speak true; others belie the working of God's grace towards them. Therefore we must put it to the trial; for one may get a sight of Christ, and not know that it is he, John xx. 14; Luke xxiv. 16. I ask you, then, what effect on you has the sight which you have got this day?—Has this day's sight humbled you more, made you more vile and loathsome in your own eyes, filled you with shame and blushing, and self-loathing? It is a sign you have seen the Lord, Job xlii. 5, 6.—Has it weaned you more from the world, sunk the value of all created excellency with you, made you see through the bulky vanity of the world, that you are resolved you shall feed no more on these husks? Matth. xiii. 45, 46. Rev. xii. 1.—Has it made the body of sin and death heavier than it used to be?—May be some of you think, ye have been undone at this communion with an ill heart, that drew a veil between Christ and you; and now ye are crying, Rom. vii. 24, “O wretched man

that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" O to be quit of this burden at any rate! O to be beyond a sinning condition! welcome grim death, so that it would take off the burden. Truly, if it be so, it has been so thin a veil, that you have got a sight of Christ through it, Isa. vi. 5; Luke ii. 29, 30.—Has it kindled a superlative love in your own heart to this unseen Lord? Do ye love him more than all persons and things else? Psalm lxxiii. 25. If it be so, ye have seen him, Luke xxiv. 32. Sick of love, argues a blink of the face of the lovely one received. Therefore, bless God, and be thankful. It is bastard humility to belie the grace of God. Walk so as the world may take notice that you have seen what they never saw, and have been where their ungracious feet never carried them. And show this in personal and relative holiness, Acts iv. 13. Commend the way of God to others. Tell them it is good to be on the mount. Speak good of God's house, and give it your testimony, before despisers of Christ and ordinances; especially before poor discouraged sinners, those who desert ordinances, alleging God not to be found in them.—Finally, quench not the Spirit, cherish his motions, and follow on to know the Lord.

3. Ye who have made this solemn approach, but really have not seen the Lord, set ye about your proper duty.—Search out, mourn over the cause of this, and quickly flee to the blood of Christ for its removal. You have not seen the Lord; and is there not a cause? yes, sure he has a quarrel with you, and therefore has withdrawn himself. Seek it out. The fault has been either in your state, that you are yet in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. This is a fundamental mistake. Or it has been in your frame. Either you have not been at pains to prepare, or have sat down on your preparation; or some idol of jealousy has been nourished:—or it has been in your faithless management. Wonder ye in a special manner, that ye have come off safe, and that upon you the Lord has not laid his hand. Do not fret that you are come off with nothing; but, O bless him that you are come off at all!

Lastly, Go back to the throne with all speed. Though the communion-table be drawn here, it is not yet drawn to you in heaven; Joel iii. 21, "For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed; for the Lord dwelleth in Zion." Follow on to know the Lord. Be not like the mixed multitude, who, disappointed of the milk and honey of Canaan, would needs go back to the onions and the garlic in Egypt. If you do so, his soul will abhor you: Heb. x. 38, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Say not, I will never see the Lord now: for, wherefore has he spared you, but that you might have occasion to have your marred work amend-

ed? And if ye wait on long, wouder not, it is a mercy ye have access to wait on. Lay down the resolution in Lam. iii. 49, 50, "Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without intermission, till the Lord look down, and behold from heaven;" and in Isa. viii. 17, "I will wait upon the Lord that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him." Amen.

GOD NOT ASHAMED TO BE CALLED HIS PEOPLE'S GOD.*

SERMON X.

HEB. xi. 16,

Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

God has a peculiar people in the world, though these are few in number. Satan is called the god of this world; and indeed is so, in regard the greater part of the world, even the whole natives of the weary land, are his. But there is a select company, who are in, but not of the world; a people of a peculiar character, who are strangers and pilgrims in the earth; whose heads and hearts are towards the better country.—In the text we have their peculiar privilege, "God is not ashamed to be called their God." More is implied than is here said. God, who is the God of the whole earth, is their God in a peculiar manner, by a special covenant-relation; and he will own it before all the world, however they be despised by the world. They are savingly interested in him, and he is peculiarly interested in them. As they are not ashamed to be called his people, unless it be for this, that they do not look more like him; so he is not ashamed to be called their God. (*Greek, to be surnamed.*)

There are two things which make men ashamed to own a relation; one upon the part of their relatives, another upon their own part. But neither are in this case.

1. He is not ashamed on their part, to be called their God. He is not ashamed of them, (as the Greek text bears expressly), as men sometimes are of their relations because of their scandalous character, as our Lord says he will be ashamed of some, so as that he will not own them, Mark viii. 38. The reason of this is intimated in the text, in the particle *wherefore*, which leads us back to the character of those who are indeed God's people, exemplified in Abra-

* Delivered October, 1722.