

called for by God at your hand. "The way of the Lord is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity." One's call to a work must first be cleared, before he can justly look to the Lord, to be with him in it. The communication of grace is not to be expected out of the way of duty.

3. When your duty is cleared be emptied of yourselves; and make nothing in you your confidence. Look upon yourselves as empty vessels that must be filled from heaven, else nothing to purpose can be done by them. Amen.

Ettrick, July 7, 1717.

MAN, SINFUL MAN IS A COMPLAINING CREATURE.

SERMON XXIII.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 39.

Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?

THIS world is like an hospital, where every one is groaning under some uneasiness or other. It is so filled with complaints, that from the king to the beggar, nobody is free; the melancholy sound of them is to be heard in the lowest cottage, and the most stately palace is not free of them. Sin is that which brings on the ground of complaints and sin brings them out; and therefore religion checks them in the text. The prophet himself had been complaining in the former part of the chapter, he seemed to have represented God as unkind and severe. Here he checks himself, and chides himself for doing so, declaring that neither he nor others, had any good reason for any such fretting disposition. "Wherefore doth a living man complain," &c.

In these words it is supposed, that man is apt to complain under afflicting dispensations. It is expressed that he ought not to complain, but patiently to submit himself under the hand of God.

Observe here 1. The fault taxed, complaining, so the word is used of murmurers, Numb. xi. 1. "And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord." It denotes an action that passeth on a man's self, and intimates fretting, whereby one torments himself increasing his own grief and sorrow, for his affliction.

2. The unjustifiableness of this before the Lord, why doth a liv-

ing man complain? Or what doth he complain of? What can he say to justify his own uneasiness under the frowns of providence. Losers think they may have leave to speak; but religion teaches, rather to lay our hands on our mouths, and our mouths in the dust before the Lord, who does us no wrong.

3. On what accounts it is unjustifiable, what are these things that may silence all our complaints? We are men that should act more rationally. We are living men that might therefore be in a worse condition. We are sinful men, whose hardships are the just punishment of our sins. We are men that have another thing to do. A man for his sin. So the Hebrew. Let each man complain for his sin. So the Dutch read it.

The words of the text are few but very comprehensive, I shall more accurately notice them, and glean a few things from them. I shall do this by raising and illustrating a series of observations founded upon the several parts of the text.

Observation I. There is a sinful complaining under crosses and afflictions. *Why doth a man complain?* It is true, God doth not absolutely require the afflicted to stop their mouths.

1. Let them complain of themselves, as the causes of their own woe. So they may do. "My soul, says Job, is weary of my life: I will leave my complaint upon myself." So men ought to do, for their own sins are the procuring causes of all the hardships with which they meet. "Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee." And again, says the same prophet Jeremiah, "Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you." The sinful nature, heart and life, are father, mother, and nurse, to all the miseries that come upon us. These are the carcase to which these eagles gather together. Remove that, and they would all quickly fly away. If the clouds return after the rain, let us blame our own misguidance.

2. Let them complain to God and welcome, Psal. cii. 1—11. When the waters of affliction gather in their breasts let them come to a gracious God, and open the sluice before him as Hannah did, who in the bitterness of her soul prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. He hath an ear ever ready to hear the complaints of his people, though men may be deaf to them. Each of them may say, *My God will hear me.* He hath also a heart to sympathize with them. "In all their affliction, he is afflicted." A hand to help them. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear." And indeed, here would be sufficient ease under all afflictions, if people had as much grace as to lay their complaints on themselves, and leave them

to God and before him. This would make all right, even where one's case is farthest wrong: thus Haannah disburdened herself, "And her countenance was no more sad." But pride of heart and unbelief binds the load on the complainer's own back.

But there are sinful complainings under afflictions.

1. We must not complain of God. It is dangerous to table a complaint against the sovereign Ruler of the world, whose sovereignty may silence us, and whose infinite purity and holiness may satisfy us, that he does us no wrong. When the creature libels his Creator who shall sit to judge betwixt them? To whose tribunal is he answerable, who does in heaven and earth according to his own will?

2. We must not complain of our lot, or murmur because better has not fallen to our share. They who do this, "are murmurers and complainers, walking after their own lusts." He that blames his lot reproaches him that allowed it to him. Every one ought to think. All men sit at God's table, and God himself carves every one's part to him. A holy wise providence doth this, and to complain of the dispensation is sinful and hazardous, as reflecting on the wisdom and holiness of the sovereign manager.

3. We must not arrest our complaining eye on the unjust instruments of our afflictions, like the dog snarling at the stone, but looking not to the hand that casts it. "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" This is to make a god of the creature and then to rise up against it. David was aware of this, and kept from splitting on this rock in his affliction. "And the king said, what have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah? So let him curse because the Lord hath said unto him, curse David, who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so? The sick man if he be wise, will neither blame the physician nor the lancet for his pain; knowing that his disease is the procuring cause, though they be instrumental causes of it. To clear this farther, men's complaints under affliction are sinful,

1. When they are accompanied with any the least rising of the heart against God, or his holy providence. Discontentment and dissatisfaction with what providence has laid to our hands, is contrary to faith which says, he doth all things well; and to holiness which teaches a perfect resignation to the divine will and pleasure, saying, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

2. Much more are complaints sinful, when they are mingled with hard speeches against God and providence. These, says Jude, "are hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against God." These are open reflections on God, striking against his honour.

When the hearts even of the saints are disturbed under pressing afflictions, it is hard to get such a clear fire from them, that will be free of this smoke. "Thou art become cruel unto me, says Job, with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me." Hence they often choose to say nothing, for fear of speaking amiss. Thus Aaron in an awful moment, *Held his peace*. Or they chose to assert in the first place the righteousness of God, saying, "Righteous art thou O Lord, when I plead with thee."

3. When the complaining humour raises such a fog and mist as hides their mercies from their sight. Thus it did with Rachel, "She envied her sister, and said unto Jacob, give me children, or else I die." No wonder it did so with Haman, Esther v. 13. It was this the prophet was aware of in his complaints; when he said "Thy mercies are new every morning, and great is thy faithfulness." When the voice of men's complaints rises so high, as to drown the voice of their praises they are certainly sinful. For let men be low as they will in this world, their praises for mercies should have the ascendant of their complaints. For we are, "In every thing to give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

4. When it so discomposeth as to unfit a person for the work of his ordinary calling. That holds good in many respects. "For the sorrow of the world worketh death." The scripture makes a very honourable mention of Abraham's applying himself to his necessary business, when he was under the heavy affliction of his wife's death, Gen. xxiii. 3—18. And when trouble does so discompose men's minds, as they cannot manage their necessary affairs, it is an evidence that it is wrong.

Lastly, It is sinful, especially when it unfits men for the work of their Christian calling, and the service of God. "I am so troubled, says the Psalmist, that I cannot speak. I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed." Afflictions are in that respect, like the wind to a ship at sea; if the wind be kept in measure, it causes the ship to sail swift, but if it rise boisterous, it is ready to overwhelm the vessel. If afflictions be well managed, they quicken men to the service of God; but if the spirit be overwhelmed by them, they quite unfit for the service, either causing it to cease, or to drive on heavily in it. Thus Aaron said, "such things have befallen me; and if I had eaten the sin offering to-day, should it have been accepted in the sight of the Lord. The Israelites also are said to have covered the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying out, insomuch that he regarded not the offering any more, or received it with good-will at their hand."

Observation II. Sinful complaining is self-tormenting. The word

signifies, to make one's self sad, to vex, fret, and disturb himself. God makes him sad by his providence, and he makes himself sadder by his impatience and distrust. Sinful complaining is a thankless office. It is so,

1. To God whose Spirit is grieved with it, and provoked to anger by it. "And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; and the Lord heard it; and his anger was kindled: and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost part of the camp." For it is quite contrary to the great duty of faith in God, which leads to the soul's resting in God. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him."

2. To others, as marring the harmony of society, and often when people give way to that black passion, God in his just judgment inhibits others, that they have no power to help the complainer. "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness."

3. To a person's self it is disagreeable and tormenting. It is a breach of the sixth commandment, a sin against one's own life, destructive to the body, "A broken spirit drieth the bones. And to the soul also, for by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken." It is agreeable to none but Satan, who was a murderer from the beginning; who being a malcontent against the government of heaven, strives to increase that disposition in the world, and uses the fretful and complaining passions in a person's own heart; as a sword to pierce himself. The sinful complainer puts a load above his own burden. For if one's will were submitted to the will of God, how easy would it be to bear afflictions; but when the proud heart cannot stoop, the apprehension magnifies the cross, and of a molehill makes a mountain.

Observation III. Man, sinful man, is a complaining creature. Why doth he complain? It supposes he does so. Sinful complaining much abounds in the world. There is no reason can be given to justify it, but there are several reasons or causes of the unreasonable practice.

1. Men do not entertain due thoughts of the sovereignty of God, and his awful majesty, Matth. xx. 11—15. God's sovereignty would, if duly seen and considered, quell the mutiny of unruly passions, that rise within men's breasts, and arraign the great ruler of the world at their bar, for mismanagement. We are absolutely his and he may dispose of us as he will, and all that is ours, and we are obliged to obey him without disputing, and to submit without quarrelling.

2. Men often see not the designs of holy providence, and they are

apt to suspect the worst, for guilt is a nurse and mother of fears. Providence is a mystery, the design of which is sometimes not easily discovered. "Thy way, O God, is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known." And many times when the Lord is working for men's good, they strongly suspect an evil designed against them, as Jacob did, *All these things*, said he, *are against me*. Hence they complain of their crosses, as if they were curses; and of what providence designs for their good, as if it were for their destruction.

3. Pride of heart is the cause of sinful complaining. Men are naturally like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. But a soul truly humbled will not dare to quarrel with God, but will rather say, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." When David was in his haste he was ready to complain of every one, of the prophet Nathan among others, and of God under that covert. "I said in my haste all men are liars." But when his soul was humbled in him, he lays his hand on his mouth and lies down at God's feet, saying, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty. My soul is even as a weaned child." An unsubdued spirit under a cross makes a heavy burden.

4. Unmortified lust, when crossed with afflictions makes a fearful mutiny. Rachel's heart was too much set upon the comfort of children, and providence disappointing her desire, she complains heavily, Gen. xxx. 1. Jonah with his gourd, chap. iv. 6—9. If men were not too much addicted to the creature, too closely wedded to the things of time, they would not raise such complaints on the loss of them. Our over much fondness of the world's smiles, make the frowns of it so hard to bear. If our hearts were loosed from the world, we would care the less whether it smiled or frowned. We would have a holy indifference both of its good and evil. Grasp hard a man's hand that hath a sore finger, he presently cries out; but if his hand was whole, he would take it kindly.

5. Want of a due sense of the evil of sin and of our unworthiness on that account. They that see their sins and have a heart to mourn for them, will not see occasion to complain of what they are under, but rather wonder that their burden is not made heavier, Lam. iii. 22. And a stroke of the Spirit of grace, at the rocky heart to cause the waters of godly sorrow gush out, would finish sinful complaints; the stream of dissatisfaction and sorrow would be turned another way.

6. Overlooking our mercies. Did men consider what mercies compass them about in their lowest condition in this world; and how

all these are forfeited by sin, and yet continued by grace and free favour, they would not complain. But when men hide their eyes from seeing the many obligations they stand under to kind providence, and count all nothing that is left them, no wonder they be so unreasonable as to complain.

7. Dwelling and poring upon crosses and difficulties. This is just taking an unbelieving lift of our own burden, which will certainly increase it. Jacob would not call his son Ben-oni, though Rachel desired it. An unmortified fancy is a heavy plague, which cleaves to an affliction as the fire does on tinder, and will not suffer it to go out of itself.

Lastly, Unbelief is the great cause of all. It was the generation that believed not that murmured in the wilderness. Faith brings the soul to rest in God in all conditions. It satisfies the soul with a full Christ in the want of all things, Habak. iii. 17—19. It realizes the things of another world, and where they have their due weight, truly the value of the things of time will sink very low. Upon the other hand unbelief turns the soul out of its rest in God, unto the creature where it must needs be restless, and blocking up the soul's sight of better things, it magnifies both the good and evil of a present world.

Observation IV. Because we are men we ought not to complain. Why doth a man complain?

1. We are men and not brutes. We are endowed with rational faculties, by which we may take up such considerations, from the sovereignty of God and the demerit of our sins, that might silence our complaints. The brutes bear a part of the load laid on the world for sin, and they groan under it, Rom. viii. 22. They complain as they are capable, and no wonder, for they know not who has laid the burden on them, nor for what it is laid on, nor whether it will be taken off. But we are men that may know all these, and why should we complain.

2. We are men and not Gods, creatures and not Creators, subjects and not lords, and therefore ought to submit and not to complain. "Let the potsherd of the earth strive with one another, but will man strive with God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?" Will weak man enter the lists with omnipotence? Will we live in God's world and not submit to his government? Is it fit that man should be independent and carve out his lot for himself? "Should it be according to thy mind? He will recompense it whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose." Shall the night owl pick a quarrel with the sun, because it cannot bear its light? And will blind man pick a quar-

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rel with holy wise providence, because it does not in every point answer his foolish desires?

3. We are men and not angels. We are not inhabitants of the upper regions, where no storms blow, where there is an eternal spring and uninterrupted peace. But we dwell in the lower region where no such thing is to be expected, but the clouds will return after the rain. Can we think that the rocks must be removed for us, that God's unchangeable purpose in the management of the world must be changed for us? If we are men, we must not complain, that what is common to men, the greatest of men, the best of men, befalls us.

3. We are men and not devils. We, at our worst, in this world, are not in that desperate, hopeless, and helpless state in which they are. But have something to comfort us which they have not. They have no Saviour, "For Christ verily took not on him the nature of angels: but he took on him the seed of Abraham." They fell into an abyss of misery in which they are sinking to this day, and ever will sink; but no hand was ever stretched out to help them. We also fell into an abyss of misery by sin, and while we are wet with the least part of it, our Lord stretches out his hand to pull us out. And shall we complain that we feel some of this misery, and not rather praise, that help is offered to pull us out of it, and restore us to happiness?

Observation V. Because we are living men we ought not to complain. "Wherefore doth a living man complain?" The force of this lies here.

1. Our life is forfeited yet continued, therefore there is no reason to complain. Life is forfeited by sin, which was forbidden unto man under the pain of death. We have sinned, and therefore incurred the penalty. "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," And why should living Adam (as it is in the Hebrew) complain, who deserving death is but banished or deprived of his wealth? Such an one has reason rather to commend the clemency, than to inveigh against the severity of his prince. Are we deprived of some comforts of life, we might have been deprived of life itself? Are we cast into a cloud of cares and perplexities, we might have been buried in a grave?

2. Living, we are not in hell, and therefore should we praise and not complain, Lam. iii. 22. Would people in their afflictions look to the state of the damned, the smoke of whose torment ascends for ever and ever, and withal remember that God in justice, might have had them in that state by this time, they would lay their hands on their mouths and not complain of what they meet with in the land of

the living. How willingly would such exchange their lot with the most afflicted in the land of the living, "For the spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity : but a wounded spirit who can bear."

3. Living, we have the means of grace and hopes of glory. So we have access to better our estate in the other world, if it should never be better in this. Living, time is given to us for working. Life is the day, "the night cometh when no man can work. Whatsoever then thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest." If we work out our salvation in this time, our happiness shall be such after death, as all our afflictions shall never be remembered any more. And the more afflicted our lot in the world is, it may the more stir us up to mind our great work.

4. Living, it may be worse with us ere we go out of the world than it is, if we do complain. The heaviest case in which one is here, he may still bless God, that it is not worse. It is easy for infinite power to punish us still seven times more, and to heat the furnace of our affliction hotter and hotter, Lev. xxvi. It were good for the afflicted, that they would often think how the Lord can, and justly may, make their case worse. This would cause them lay their hands upon their mouths.

5. Living, we may live to see our case better. While there is life there is hope, "Why then should a living man complain?" We have to do with a bountiful God. "He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger for ever." They have been very low who have been raised up, and they have been wrapt up in a thick cloud, who yet have had a fair sunshine after. The rains do not fall, nor the winds blow always. The wheel of providence hath four sides, and can in a moment take a quite contrary course to that which it now keeps. If our troubles be from the immediate hand of God. "Then though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies." If they are from the hand of others, their heart is in his hand, and that which is crooked will be made straight, when God will, though not when we will.

6. We have no surer hold of our life than of the comforts of life. The latter are uncertain, so is the former. Our comforts are slippery, our life frail, and liable to a great many more accidents than our comforts of life, for the most part are. Is our life then preserved, while some of our comforts are lost, let us praise the preserver of men and not complain. The stroke that takes away a comfort might have taken away our life.

7. When other comforts are lost, and our life is continued, that which is best is preserved to us. Life is better than the outward

comforts of life. "For the life is more than meat, and the body more than raiment. But the favour of God is better than life." If then a man were stript of all his enjoyments, health, wealth, ease, and every thing, yet while he is living he may recover the lost favour of God; but there is no recovering of it when life is gone, as the tree falls it lies. And were this only considered, one single breathing would be more valuable to us, than all we have in the world.

Lastly, The time of life is the time for all men's praising, because they sit all at the common table of mercy, and therefore not for complaining. "The living, he shall praise thee." They that will not rest on the will of God, will get a long eternity to complain in, but here it is both their sin and misery. I know the doctrine would bear us in hand, that there should be no sin in hell after the last judgment, and then the damned will not be capable of the least thought materially evil. But the scripture tells us, "The wicked are driven away in their wickedness;" and they are so far from being cured there, that they are filled with blasphemies. While they weep, wail, and gnash their teeth, will there not be the least fretful thought against God? They are not sanctified there, their natural corruption remains, and will it never in the least set up its head? But will they love a tormenting God with all their heart? Will they be perfectly contented with their lot? This the eternal law of righteousness requires of the creature, as a creature, and therefore in every state, if they do it not they sin. Because we are living then let us praise, and not complain, lest we complain for ever.

Observation VI. We are sinful men justly punished for our sin, and therefore ought not to complain. *A man for the punishment of his sins?* Consider here,

1. Our sins are the procuring causes of all afflictions. "Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee." We may thank ourselves for all our crosses, and therefore complain of ourselves, each saying with Job, "I will leave my complaint upon myself:" but will not complain of God; *for he doth not afflict willingly.* Affliction rises not out of the dust, but out of a sinful nature, heart, and life. God hath joined together the evil of sin, and the evil of punishment, hence drawing the first link of this chain, we draw the other also on ourselves, why then do we complain?

2. When our afflictions are at the highest pitch in this world, yet they are not so great as our sins deserve. "After all, says Ezra, that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve. And says David, He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." How many of our sins

does the Lord mercifully overlook, not smiting every time we sin against him, but he is long-suffering, and when he does, he debates with us in measure, otherwise we should have judgment without mercy. What face then can we have to complain after all this? We sin with a high hand, and the Lord smites softly, and yet we cry out as if we were wronged, and treated cruelly.

3. We receive much undeserved good, while at the worst we get but our deserved evil. Our cup is a mixture of sweet with bitter; while the bitterest cup is put in our hand, let us then rather praise him for the undeserved sweet, than complain for the deserved bitterness that is in it, saying with Job, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil." It is an evidence of an embittered spirit to overlook our mercies, and pore upon our crosses, to deny unto our bountiful God the due praise of his free favours, because he visits us with some crosses.

4. Our afflictions are necessary for us, wherefore do we complain, Lam. iii. 33. Our necessities extort them out of God's hand, for he has no pleasure otherwise in the miseries of his creatures. "Have I any pleasure at all, says he, that the wicked should die? And not that he should return from his ways and live?" A child left to himself and a person undisciplined by crosses will go all wrong. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." If we could attain it, we would take a bed, in which no thorn of uneasiness would be found; but if it were so, we would sleep too sound. Our hearts are hard to wean from a frowning world, how would we do if it were smiling on every hand. Nay, there are many mercies in thy lot, there must be a mixture of crosses in it, something crooked, something wanting, to be a corrective. Why then should we be so angry with our blessings?

5. We might get out from under them, if we would speedily answer the design of them, Lev. xxvi. 41, 42. They are God's medicines which if we would suffer to work kindly, we should soon recover. If people would answer the design of afflicting dispensations, the Lord would remove them, he would cast away the rod, when there were no more use for it to the child. But continuing stupid and impenitent under our crosses, we wreath the yoke about our own neck faster.

6. How often is the sin visibly written on the punishment, that men may clearly see the cause of God's contending, and lay their mouths in the dust. It is a silencing consideration. "As I have done, so God hath requited me." How often are we scorched with a fire of our own kindling, yea, we nurse the viper that gnaws out our bowels, and our cross is the native fruit of our own conduct.

Observation VII. Under our afflictions we should turn our complaints on our sins. *A man for his sins.*

We have sins of nature, heart, and life. We have many things wrong in our way, something that is in a special manner the cause of the controversy, that brings on the stroke. Let us turn the stream of our complaints that way.

1. Instead of complaining of God, let us complain of ourselves to God, instead of taxing a holy God with severity, let us charge ourselves with folly before him. "So foolish was I and ignorant, says Asaph, I was as a beast before thee. My wounds stink and are corrupt, says David, because of my foolishness." If we begin to find fault with the work of providence, we will instantly go wrong, and think and speak what we ought not; but our own sinful ways and doings, we shall be in no hazard readily of making them blacker than they are.

2. Instead of the heart's bleeding for trouble, let our hearts bleed for sin. David's heart smote him after he had numbered the people, and he confessed his great sin in doing it. By trouble we are offended and our peace is broken; by sin God is offended, and his Spirit grieved. And his pleasure is to be preferred to our ease, and therefore the main stream of our sorrow should run on sin, not on affliction, which should but open the heart to bleed for sin.

3. Instead of tossing our cross in our minds to fret ourselves, let us toss our sin there to humble ourselves. O! what thoughts are unprofitably bestowed on our afflictions, that might be well spent in seeking out the cause of the Lord's controversy, in loathing ourselves for it, applying to the blood of Christ for pardon of the sins that are at the root of our trouble.

4. Instead of labouring to get up our lot to our mind, let us labour to get our minds brought down to our lot. Let us lay the axe of mortification to the root of these lusts that keep up our minds above our lot. This was the lesson Paul had learned, though it is not easy. "I have learned, says he, in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content." There is a crook in every man's lot, which he cannot make straight, and something wanting which he cannot supply. The best way is to bow the mind to the crook, and learn to want that of which providence sees fit to refuse the supply. Let us set ourselves to this way of managing crosses.

1. It will stop the running issue of sinful complaining. When one bleeds excessively at one part of the body, they use to open a vein in another part, to turn the stream from that part and so to stop it there. And they that are upon the fret, and carried away in the complaining humour for their crosses, cannot in that case meet

with a greater mercy, than to have the heart vein opened to bleed for sin. They will find the other will stop presently.

2. Repenting under a rod is profitable, but repining is hurtful. Suppose repentance have a bitterness with it, yet since we must be in bitterness, better repent than repine. If we feel the prickles of the rose bush, yet there is something pleasant and profitable to be gathered of it. But to be scratched with briers, the scratching is all, there is nothing worth the pains growing upon them. Repentance has joy included in it, but repining all over has nothing desirable.

3. This is the way to get good of crosses. To get meat of the eater, and sweet out of the strong; to make spiritual advantage by temporal losses. Hereby every wound we get in an evil world, might be a wound to our lusts, and so bring health to our souls. Every stone thrown at us by any hand might turn to better account than a precious stone. And by these cross winds we might be driven to our harbour.

4. This is the readiest way to get free of our crosses. When a man is brought to this he is prepared for a deliverance. "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." When men's complaints are turned this way, and people are more careful to get free of sin than of trouble, that is a special time for a gracious God's lifting off his hand, who will never lay on man more than is meet.

5. The neglect of this leads into many snares. He that gets not his heart to submit to his affliction, either will continue his complaints, and so be a tormentor to himself, or otherwise will be in hazard of using unlawful endeavours for freeing himself from it. Hence when this sits down upon one's spirit, and they go not to God with it, they are ready to go to carnal company for their ease, to sensual pleasures, which is called diverting, but is really destructive to their souls.

I come now to the application of the whole, and let me address you in the words of the text, "Why do we being living men complain, men for the punishment of our sins?" Since we are men, living men, justly punished for our sins when we are afflicted, why do we sinfully complain? Why do we not rather turn our complaints on sin, and repent and not repine? Is there any reason to justify sinful complaining and murmuring under afflicting dispensations. The complaining humour wants not its pretences; but let us examine them.

1. There is no sorrow like my sorrow, says the complainer, no person afflicted at the rate I am. Answer. Every one feels what he

himself endures, but is no competent judge of the sorrows of others to which he is a stranger. "The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy." The world affords many miserable objects, who with heart and good-will would exchange lots with any of us all; and God is no more obliged to be kind to us than to them. And no doubt, were our crosses and those of many others in the world laid down together to be exchanged, we would readily take up our own again, for fear of a worse. But suppose there were none like them in the world; yet thou art a living man, and since thou art so, and not in hell, thou hast no reason to complain, since thou mightest justly have been in that hopeless condition in which thou art not. And if thou canst see no sorrow on the earth like thine, look into the state of the damned and thou wilt see worse, which may put you to silence.

But again, if thou wert duly sensible of thy sin, thou wouldest say, There is no sin like mine; thou like Paul wouldest reckon thyself the chief of sinners: thou mayest see more ill in thyself than in others; and therefore shouldest not complain, though no sorrow were like thine, because thou wouldest look upon it as the just punishment of thy sin.

2. But yet my trouble is very extraordinary, few have met with such a one. Answer. Job's trouble was extraordinary, and he was reproached with that, "Call now, if there be any that will answer thee: and to which of the saints wilt thou turn?" Yet he bore them very patiently, and when he was out of the hurry of temptation, saw no reason to complain of holy providence, Job ii. 10. Our acquaintance with the world is very narrow, and no doubt it has been the case of many, what we think has been the case of very few. But though many have no acquaintance with our cross, yet we deserve all we meet with, and that should silence us; and though others may deserve it too, yet, shall our eye be evil, because the eye of the sovereign Ruler of the world is good. Besides these others may have their crosses, which we are as little acquainted with, as they are with ours.

I could bear any cross better than that which providence has laid upon me. Answer. That is but the product of a deceitful heart, which still thwarting with the divine will, prefers any thing to the present duty. We are in that case like one in sore sickness, who shifts from place to place, still thinking he would be better in another place than where he is, but when he tries it he obtains no relief and so returns to his bed again. But what if it be so that thou couldst bear any trial better than the one thou art under. Truly if there be one thing lacking in thee, thou mayest be sure

God will try thee in that point to discover thee to thyself, if thou wilt at all see thy own case; and *what one thing thou lackest*. The hardest cross for a man to bear, is that which strikes against a man's predominant affection or lust. And that which thou findest to be the affliction thou canst least bear, may serve to discover where thy weak side lies. And in the trials made upon, consists the greatest trial of one's sincerity. "I was upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity."

4. Others triumph over me, and make my trouble the matter of my reproach. Answer. This has been the case of the best of the saints. See how it was with Job, xxx. 9—14. and David, Psal. iii. 2. as a true type of Christ, Psal. lxi. 12. And did not the Jews mock, scoff, and deride Christ himself in his bitter sufferings? But though they complained to God, yet not of God for it. Truly those that do so add affliction to the afflicted, and speak to the grief of those whom the Lord hath wounded, have the worst of it themselves. "Whoso mocketh the poor, reproacheth his Maker; and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished." And such treatment may well further thy deliverance, it shall not retard it, if thou conductest thyself rightly under it, Zech. i. 15, 16.

5. My trouble has been of a long continuance, I have looked for a deliverance, but it hath not come. Answer. This hath often been the case of the Lord's people, Jer. viii. 15—23. But they may blame themselves when it is so. *For the Lord afflicteth not willingly*. Surely there is a cause. Hast not thou put a stop to thy own deliverance? Perhaps thou art not prepared for it yet. "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." Thou hast not got thy heart brought to an entire submission. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." None blame the husbandman, because he sows not his seed, before the ground, by plowing, be fitted to receive it; and do not thou blame providence for suspending thy deliverance till thy heart be humbled, thy complaints be silenced, and thou be as a weaned child.

6. My case seems to be hopeless and alway the longer the more hopeless. Answer. If thou cannot believe, and resign thyself entirely to the Lord, without complaining, it seems thy deliverance is near, because man's extremity is God's opportunity. "For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants; when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left." Either thou shalt be delivered from the trouble, as Abraham on the mount, or the people at the red sea; or the disciples in the ship, when the wind ceased in a moment. Or delivered in

trouble, from the evil and sting of it, getting strength to bear it, and sufficient comfort under it. "My grace is sufficient for thee, says God, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Say thou then with Paul, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." For our gracious God loves to work for his people's help, when they are in the most helpless condition.

7. My life is one continued train of troubles, and I am every day meeting with new ones. Answer. So it has been with the best of God's children, Job says "My sighing cometh before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like the waters." Asaph says, "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning." Our Lord himself was a man of sorrows. And he hath fairly warned us of this, that we must take up our cross daily. And since every day hath the sin thereof, what wonder that it have also the evil thereof, Where is the ground to complain here? The root of sin is firmly fixed in us, and there is need of much tossing to loose it. We have much dross and it requires our being frequently in the furnace. If it be the will of God that you have more frequent troubles than others, there is ground to stoop to sovereignty, that takes not one method with all, but no ground to complain.

8. I suffer wrongfully even from those, at whose hands I deserved it not. Answer. Sin hath put the world into confusion, and having set men against God, hath set them also against one another. We have contributed to this disorder, and must not complain that we share the bitter effects of it. We have grieved God's Spirit who never did us any wrong, and that should silence us, when others mete that measure to us, which we have meted to our gracious God. All our fellow creatures are in the Lord's hand, and they can be no more comfortable to us than he makes them to be; neither can they be more heavy upon us, than he permits them for our trial and correction; and therefore we should look up to heaven in this case and forbear to complain. Thus David said of Shimei, so let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, curse David. Who shall then say, wherefore hast thou done so?

Lastly, My trouble is in itself exceeding great, I know not how to bear it. Answer. As great as it is, it may be greater, since thou art a living man. As great as it is, it is less than thine iniquity deserves. Were thy trouble and thy sin weighed in an even balance, the latter would weigh down the former. Why then should a living man complain, for such a punishment of his sin? The more resigned thou art to the will of God, thou wilt bear it the better for the complaining disposition, may well make thy trouble

heavier, it will make it no lighter. And so we should conclude, that there is no solid reason why man should complain.

Consider the evil of this sinful complaining, and murmuring, and impatience under afflicting dispensations.

1. It is rebellion against the will of God. To the murmuring Israelites, Moses says, *Hear ye rebels*. God governs the world, and shall we malcontents, that are not pleased with his government, rise in mutiny against it? What pleaseth God, shall it displease us? And what is right in his eyes, shall it be evil in ours? Will nothing please us but to have the reins of government out of his hands into our own? "Should it be according to thy mind? He will recompense it, whether thou refuse or whether thou choose, and not I." If our passion did not blind us, we might see how we would quickly fire the little world of our own and others' condition, if the reins were in our own hands.

2. It is a killing sorrow to one's self. "The sorrow of the world worketh death." It melts one's heart within him, and like a vulture preys upon his natural spirits to shorten his days. God crosseth the complainer's will, and therefore he pierceth himself through with many sorrows; as if a man should wrap up himself in darkness because he cannot stop the course of the sun.

3. It is a fretting anger against one's lot. "Murmurers and complainers walk after their own lusts." Complainers, such as are dissatisfied with their lot, and with the distributions of providence, complain of the least, and worse falls to their share. They bark at the mountains of brass, the immoveable purposes of God, as dogs at the moon and with equal success. They disquiet and vex themselves in vain, like men dashing their heads against a rock, which still stands unmoved, but their heads are wounded. They are like a wild bull in a net, the more he stirs, the faster he is caught; so that still the complainers return with loss.

4. It is a charging God foolishly. This Job did not. It is an impious libelling and accusing the administration of the sovereign Ruler of the world, and that of folly, as if he were not wise enough to govern the world. The complainer seems to see many flaws in the conduct of providence, and pretends to tell how God's work might be corrected. It accuses him also of injustice, as if he did us wrong in afflicting us, or laid on us more than is meet. The Judge of all the earth cannot be biassed nor bribed, yet the sinful complainer charges him as an acceptor of persons and a rigid governor.

5. It robs God of his due praise for the manifold mercies in our lot. Place a sinful complainer in a paradise, the fruit of that one tree which is forbidden him, and about which he is uneasy, will so

embitter him, that he will not give God thanks for the variety of mercies, with which he is otherwise privileged. For all avail him nothing while his will is disappointed in that. With Haman he saith, *all this availeth me nothing*. He dwells so much on his complaints, that he will not and cannot value his comforts.

Directions for quelling the complaining humour.

1. Labour by faith to take up your soul's everlasting rest in God through Christ. The wise merchant is content to sit down with the loss of all, when he finds the one pearl of great price, but not till then. The heart of man must have something on which to rest. When he goes to rest in the creature, he finds the bed shorter than he can stretch himself upon it. Crosses and afflictions prevent his rest there. Should he then give up with the creature and take God in Christ for his God, his all and instead of all, then shall he find what would give ease under all disquietments in the world. Amidst all external calamities, he could then with Habbakuk, rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of his salvation.

2. Consider the sovereign authority and infinite wisdom of God. He created us and may he not do with his own what he pleaseth. Shall we go about to wrest the uncontrollable sceptre out of his hand? Shall not his sovereign dominion over us command our submission and absolute resignation? His sovereignty who giveth not an account of any of his ways may silence us. His infinite wisdom may satisfy us. There is no chance work in the world, not one stroke at random in all thy condition; it is not a work huddled up in a haste. The wheel of providence is full of eyes. Every thing in thy condition was from eternity in the womb of the wise decree, and brought upon thee accordingly. "For God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

3. Consider that the crosses with which you meet are necessary for you. For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. If thou mightest want them, thou wouldst not have them; for God takes no pleasure merely in giving his creatures pain. But he corrects us for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. If thou be under great afflictions, know that strong diseases must have strong remedies. Blame not the physician for it, but the disease. If God withdraw a comfort from thee, it is to starve a lust that would feed on it. If he lay on thee what thou wouldst not, it is but to bear down a lust that would carry thee headlong.

4. Believe there is nothing in this world, in which either your happiness or misery is bound up. The world's happiness or misery is but a shadow of these things. That only is true happiness in which a person wants nothing he can desire, and this is only to be

obtained in the enjoyment of God; and that is real misery in which a person has nothing left to comfort him, and this is not but in being utterly rejected by God.

5. Labour to be humble. Humility lets us see our true worth that it is nothing, and so fences us against complaining, Gen. xxxii. 10. It makes a person wonder that he hath any comfort at all left him; and so lets him into the mystery of, *in every thing to give thanks.*

6. Do not dwell and pore upon your crosses, for that feeds the complaining humour. Turn your eyes on your mercies left you, and be thankful for them.

7. Learn to unbosom yourself in all your griefs unto the Lord by prayer and supplication. This gave Hannah a happy ease. And go to your Bibles and get your souls refreshed with the good news from the far country, Psal. cxix. 92.

8. Exercise yourself always in some honest business. In those that are idle, Satan is busy to foster the complaining humour.

9. Resist this humour in its beginnings.

Lastly, Live by faith. By this your souls will be stayed on the promises; in all events have a favourable view of the design of God in afflictions, and fix on the things that are not seen, as the object of your chief care, and the great spring of your comfort. Amen.

Ettrick, August, 1717.

THE PLEASURES OF REAL RELIGION.

SERMON XXIV.

PROVERBS iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

THE Hebrew name of this book imports sentences well pressed together, and powerful to command our assent and regulate our conduct. In this context wisdom, or real religion is commended in the 16th verse from what she hath. They get much with her who get her. She brings to them in both hands. In the text she is commended for her discipline, the way and manner of life to which she directs her votaries. This is that which chiefly prejudices the men of the world against her, so that they cannot think to live with her. It is represented here in these two, her ways and her paths. *Her*