

Galashiels Communion, August, 1717.

SAINTS WRESTLING FOR THE BLESSING AND OBTAINING IT.

SERMON XI.

GENESIS xxxii. 26.

And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me, ver. 29. And he blessed him there.

How mean are the exploits and encounters of the most celebrated heroes, whom the world admires, in comparison of the great things done by faith. Natural courage and valour have gained a reputation to some, as if they only were the men, and valour died with them. But when the sum of all is heard, it amounts to no more but worm man striving with his fellow worm for a thing of nought, and gaining a victory which can never be more glorious than their party and cause are, the one a worm, the other *a thing which is not*, Prov. xxxiii. 5.

But behold an encounter of faith, worm Jacob wrestling with the Mighty God, the angel of the covenant, Jesus Christ, and that for the divine blessing. Both the party and the cause are great without a parallel, and the victory falls to the weak side. *And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.* In these words we see,

Jacob bringing the matter of the struggle to a precise point. They had wrestled all or a good part of the night, and when the day was breaking, the angel desires him to let him go, but Jacob holds, and tells him, Thus and thus will he do it and not otherwise. A blessing, his blessing, or he will not let him go.

Consider here the great point in wrestling Jacob is seeking. A blessing, God's blessing. Jacob was blessed before, and he had used art to obtain it, even beguiling his father which was his sin. He must be blessed again, and he uses holy violence to obtain it, even wrestling with his God, which was his laudable duty.

Thus a person once really blessed will be concerned for a further blessing. None despise the blessing, but those who are strangers to it, and are near to a curse. If there be a soul that has got any access to God in secret duties, such persons will have an edge on their spirit for a sermon or communion blessing. And they will always be seeking more of the blessing, till they receive it in full tale, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, before the foundation of the world."

From the barren rocks the showers run off as they fall, while the fruitful field drinks up the rain, that it may bring forth more fruit.

It is surely a good sign when the heart of a man is crying within him to heaven, a blessing, a blessing, a spiritual blessing. The curse locks up the heart, and lays it under bonds, that it cannot stir nor move within the man for the blessing. But a blessing opens the heart for more, and presages God's opening of his hands. There could be no better sign of a feast to be here, than this, all the children crying hunger, hunger, hunger! *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness ; for they shall be filled.*

The blessing Jacob seeks from the man that wrestled with him, and had disjoined his thigh with a touch, but had not prevailed against him. But since the less is blessed by the greater, Jacob here acknowledges his superiority over him, and humbly begs his blessing.

We may observe that the humble soul is the most likely to obtain the blessing. *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace unto the humble.* The valleys are refreshed with rain, while it runs off the mountains. And to the humble soul it will be said, *come up hither.* God's blessing does not fall by random into one's bosom ; but they that get it see first the hand from which it comes. And seeing him in his glory as the bestower of blessings, they must needs be vile, and as nothing in their own eyes. " I have heard of thee, says Job, by the hearing of the ear ; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Isaiah speaks to the same purpose, chap. vi. 5.

As ever then we would have the blessing let us be humble and vile in our own eyes. There is no room for it in the proud self-conceited sinner. " The full soul loatheth an honey-comb ; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." The swelling botch of the pride of the heart must be lanced, and dissolved, before you be meet to receive the blessing. The unhumbed sinner's hands are so swelled, that he cannot put on our Elder Brother's clothes : and we cannot receive the blessing but in them.

There are two sights which you should seek this night, if you be for the blessing. The bright and glorious sight of God's greatness, excellency, majesty and holiness. Look to his works, look to his word for it. Look and look again, till your souls be made to say within you, " Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods ? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders ?" The other is the black and dismal sight of your own vileness and unworthiness. Look through the holy spiritual law for this, and then through thy disorderly life and heart. Look and

look again, till thou be filled with self-abhorrence, and get a humbling view of your righteousness as well as your unrighteousness, and then you will come empty handed for the blessing, to buy without money, and without price, that is, purely to beg it for the Lord's sake.

The man from whom Jacob sought the blessing was the man Christ, the God-man, who took away our curse and gives us the blessing. Now they that would have the blessing must come to our Lord Jesus Christ for it. *All power in heaven and in earth is given unto him.* This is the honour which the Father has put upon the royal Mediator, to be the great steward of heaven. When the famished Egyptians came crying to Pharaoh for corn, he bade them go to Joseph. This is the Father's voice in the gospel to poor sinners that would have the blessing. He has put the key of the treasures of blessings into Christ's hands; and whoso will have it must go to him.

Come to Christ then for the blessing to get it out of his hand. For there is no other way of receiving the blessing. "God blesses us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." God out of Christ is a consuming fire, and they that presume to put forth their hand to God for it, but under the covert of his blood, will get a curse, instead of a blessing. We cannot receive it but by the hand of the Mediator, into which the Father hath put the blessing, to be communicated by him. When Christ ascended on high, "he received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell amongst them. Paul quoting these words renders them, *and gave gifts unto men.* As if he had said, we dare not meddle with the blessing to take it at our own hand, but Lord Jesus take it for us, and give it to us.

The blessing for which Jacob was so earnest, I think must be understood in a suitableness to his particular circumstances, namely the great hazard in which he and his family were by Esau, who was coming to meet him with four hundred men. Alas! what shall he do for this rencounter. He cannot think to fight him. His few servants, the women, and the young lads, his children were not fit to fight, nay, hardly to flee. Well, but a blessing will make up all this want, and the strait in which he was, makes him the more eager for it. I judge there are two things at which Jacob aimed here.

1. The ratification of his father's blessing, which he had received twenty years before. This blessing he took away from Esau, who despised it, and this was the great ground of Esau's quarrel with him. And now the time seemed to be come for the revenge of that quarrel.

We observe, that a new ratification of old blessings is a weighty errand to the throne of grace. Whom God once blesses they shall be blessed, but we cannot have the comfort of old blessings, without a fresh believing view of them. Let then old disciples and Christians of considerable standing, know that they have an errand at a communion table more than young converts and new covenanters. That is to get a ten, twenty, forty, sixty year old blessing newly ratified at this communion. God is saying unto you now, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me." Bring ye forth old experiences to be polished, and to get a new lustre upon them at this communion. And well may you do it, for it is very pleasant to the Lord, for us to promise well of free grace, and every enjoyment which a believer receives, he may call it Joseph.

Jacob saw he was like to run a great hazard for the cause of the blessing, and therefore he endeavours to be very sure of it before hand, reckoning no doubt that it would bear all the cost. They that are in hazard for religion had need to have a sure hold of it, that they do not run a risk for nought. They that suffer in the cause of religion, and yet are void of the life and power of it, are of all men the most miserable. Men hate them, because they seem to be what they are not; and God hates them because they are not what they seem to be.

If you have a mind to engage in the cause of religion, be sure to go through with, and lay a good foundation. The spirit of apostacy prevailing at this day will bring in a spirit of persecution, if God do not stem the tide. Lay your accounts with suffering, and since you must lay your accounts with it, labour by all means to have pennyworths, that you suffer not for nothing: but you have as much religion as will bear the cost of all you lose on that head.

2. A new blessing to carry him through the present distress. He was to meet Esau with his four hundred men, so he must have God's blessing before he venture out to this rencounter. He cannot face Esau without it. In solemn addresses to God, we should labour to have in our eye the evil world through which we are to pass, and the particular straits that may be immediately before us, and to get a blessing suitable for supporting us under them.

Let it be our errand to God at this communion, to get a blessing for our wilderness journey. Come in hither as travellers to an inn upon the road for a refreshment, by which we may be strengthened to go through the seen to the unseen world where glory dwells. Consider your own case, and be distinct and particular. If there be any duty or trouble before you more than ordinary, represent that

particularly to the Lord at his table, and seek direction, strength, and furniture for that particular. For our great Physician loves to see his people pointing to their sores.

3. We have Jacob's peremptoriness and resoluteness in this point. *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.* He had struggled long, and after all the angel offers to go without blessing him, for the trial of his faith and patience, but he will not quit his hold. His thigh was now disjointed; but though it should cost him more broken bones, he will not let him go.

4. The happy success. *He blessed him there.* The sore battle has a happy issue. Wrestling Jacob comes off a conqueror, and gets the blessing upon the spot.

Doctrine.—The way to get the blessing is to go to the Lord for it, resolved not to take a denial, nor to part with him even till he get it. In prosecuting this doctrine, I shall,

I. Open up this way of getting the blessing.

II. I will shew what it is that makes some souls so peremptory and resolute for the blessing, while others slight it.

III. I will shew that this is the true way to obtain the blessing, and that they who take this way will come speed. I am then,

I. To open up this way to obtain the blessing, which you may take up in these particulars. If we would have the blessing, then,

1. We must have a lively sense of our need of it. "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away." It was felt need brought the prodigal home to his father's house. *I perish*, said he, *with hunger.* They that feel not their need of the blessing will soon sit down easy without it; they will, with the raven, feed on the carrion, and take up their rest short of the ark. But a pinching sense of need is necessary to excite the soul to wrestle with God for it. For none will ever come back to the Lord, but those whom felt need drives, not knowing how to live without his blessing and favour.

2. We must by faith lay hold on Christ the store house of blessings for it. *God blesses us with all spiritual blessings in Christ.* All saving blessings are benefits of the covenant of grace, and are given to the sinner with Christ. In vain will you stand at a distance from Christ, out of the covenant, and try for the blessing; for the falling dew shall as soon pierce the rock, as your faithless importunity shall procure you the blessing, without uniting with Christ in whom only we can be blessed.

3. We must by fervent prayer wrestle with him for it. How did Jacob obtain it? "Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto him." Can they ex-

pect the blessing who will not seek it? And can they seek it to purpose, who do not seek it fervently, as those who are in good earnest, whose hearts are set upon it. "Set me, says the spouse, as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death." And says Solomon, "yea if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." Careless begging at the throne of grace does in effect court a denial. And where the blessing is to come, grace will set the heart aloft after it in the first place.

4. We must by believing the promise, keep a sure hold of the blessed Redeemer. He had said to Jacob, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea which cannot be numbered." And we find Jacob, ver. 12. reminding him of this promise. Now what way can we hold him and not let him go, but holding him by his word. They who hold him by his word, they have sure hold. Heaven and earth are not so sure as that handle by which the believer holds him. But unbelief makes the soul let go its hold, and the issue is this, the man goes away without the blessing. "Jesus saith unto her, said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God." The promises of the gospel are the conduit pipes, by which the blessings of the covenant come to the soul. Faith must suck at these by a believing application of them, or no good can come in an ordinary way.

5. We must by hope wait for the blessing. "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait I say on the Lord." God may suffer his people to wait long about his hand, and to wrestle in the dark, before the day break, but they must be resolved to bear one disappointment after another, and still to wait. "My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning." They that turn hopeless of the blessing, are in a fair way to let him go without it. For the Christian is fed by hope, as the husbandman is, who will never sow his seed where he has no hope of a harvest: "therefore cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward."

6. We must leave no mean unessayed to obtain it, but use every mean till we find it. Song iii. 1,—4. We must go through every duty and seek the Lord through all thy trysting places, where he uses to meet with his people. Yea, we must go back again and again to the same duties till we find him. Duty is ours, but times and seasons are in his hand. And they may long seek and not find who yet will obtain a joyful meeting at last.

7. No discouragements must cause us to faint. Jacob wrestles on with his disjointed thigh, though the day was broken, and it was very unfit that the shepherds, who might be tending their flocks, should see what passed betwixt the angel and him. Yet he will not let him go, he will wrestle till broad day light, before he want it. Perhaps you may go to God, and with the woman of Canaan get no answer. When "she cried, saying, have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered not a word." Perhaps you may get a breast full of convictions and no more. Perhaps great objections may be mustered up against you, to dash your hopes of prevailing. But whether these objections be taken from the heaven without you, or the hell within you, you must not give over; but make your way through them by answering them from the doctrine of the gospel. When Jesus said to the woman, it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." But in case you cannot get through the objections, even step over them; if you cannot loose the knot, cut it, and hold on. Thus when Jesus told the woman, that he was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But instead of going away, *Then she came, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.*

8. If at any time we fall, we must resolutely recover and renew the struggle. Jacob's thigh is disjointed with a touch of the angel's hand, he is so far worsted, but he makes a new vigorous sally, and tells him he will not let him go, except he bless him. They that fall in this good fight, must not lie still, but rise again, and renew the actings of faith, in opposition to sense, and hope against hope.

Lastly, We must resolve never to give over till we get it, and so hold on. *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.* If it should be noon day, if Esau should come upon me on the spot, I shall never let thee go till I get the blessing. The soul must resolve to hold on, that nothing shall end the struggle but death, or victory; that if they die without it, they shall die at his door. This is the resolute struggle, this is the way to the blessing.

Motives to urge you to this way.

1. Consider the worth of the blessing. Whatever pains, and struggles, and on-waiting it may cost, it will far more than repay the expence of all. God's blessing is God's good word to the soul, but it is big with God's grace and good deeds to the man that gets it; and that is enough to make one happy for ever. It is the purchase of Christ's death, and therefore must be most valuable. God's blessing removes the curse of the law from off the soul, entitles to

glory, and in the meantime makes all things work together for good.

2. Consider the need you have of it. You are by nature under the curse, and unless you get the blessing, you must for ever be under the curse. But, O consider, how can you want it, how can you do without it? How will you live, die, or stand before the tribunal of God without it? Your absolute need makes all things necessary in the way of getting it.

3. If you will not be at this pains for it, you will be reckoned despisers of the blessing; and that is most dangerous, and will bring on most bitter vengeance. And you will see the day you would do any thing for it when you cannot get it.

Lastly, If you will take this way you will get the blessing. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." The Lord never refused it to one that sought at this rate. Never did such a one die at his door. Amen.

Galashiels Communion, August, 1717.

[Sabbath Afternoon.]

SAINTS WRESTLING FOR THE BLESSING AND OBTAINING IT.

SERMON XII.

GENESIS xxxii. 26.

And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me, ver. 29. And he blessed him there.

If every one here were taking the liberty to express the affections, and the present frame of his heart after this communion, it is likely it would be as Ezra iii. 12, 13. "When many wept with a loud voice; and many shouted for joy. So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy, from the noise of the weeping of the people." So here, some would weep, some rejoice, while others as unconcerned spectators, who have not got the blessing, and therefore cannot rejoice; and do not miss it, and therefore cannot weep. But alas! it is the misery of many, they are too soon pleased. They begin with Jacob to wrestle for the blessing, but they cannot persevere as he did, and so they let the Lord go without blessing

them. The communion is over, but the blessing remains to those who have not yet got it, and more blessings to those that have got a taste of it; and therefore I would exhort all to hold on. In pursuance of the former doctrine we now proceed.

II. To shew what it is that makes some souls peremptory and resolute for the blessing, while others slight it.

1. Felt need engageth the soul to this course. You know what determined the lepers that sat at the gate of Samaria. Many see a want of the blessing, that find not the need of it; hence a few cold wishes for it, and if that will do, good and well, but if not they must even want it. But those that have such a gracious disposition as the person in the text, they cannot live without it. They say with Peter, *Lord to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.* Now necessity has no law, and hunger will dig through stone walls, and if it cannot dig through them, it will leap over them. So the person who is in earnest will be forward to Christ in spite of every obstacle.

2. Superlative love to and esteem of Christ engageth them to this. *Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.* Love can endure any thing but absence, the loss of a beloved object, or of a token for good from them. Our Lord has appeared in his beauty to that soul, captivated the heart, and so engaged the person with the sight of his transcendent excellency, that he cannot take it back again, and he must have his good word and good will, and he cannot lift his suit till he prevail.

3. Without the blessing all is tasteless and unsatisfactory to them. "What wilt thou give me while I go childless," said Abraham? So what can competency give to satisfy the soul that sees the worth of his favour, while the blessing is denied? It is the blessing that makes all savoury to them, and the want of it is a worm at the root of all their enjoyments. The dove out of the ark found nothing but carrion, and therefore returned. A hypocrite will bestow a few faint wishes on the blessing. Lord bless this bread. This does not answer them. But yet they remain at ease, nay, they have more doors than one to go to. If they cannot come speed with Christ, they know how to do otherwise.

4. They see not how to set out their face in an ill world without it. They say with Moses, *if thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence.* Christian Soldiers have no courage for a battle, if their Captain be not on their head. Without him, they are like Samson without hair, weak as other men. There are three things which bring them to this, they have weakness, little strength, and much opposition from within and from without. Duty is before them,

trouble is before them, and it is their care to acquit themselves well in both, and therefore they cannot think to go, unless he bless them.

Lastly, They see not how to face another world without it. David sings in the prospect of death, in confidence of the blessing. "Yea, though I walk, says he, through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff comfort me." But, O how can an enlightened soul take the passage to the unseen world, without a token, a pass for safe conduct from the Lord of that land. And therefore the person is resolute, *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.* I now proceed,

III. That this is the true way to obtain the blessing, and that they who take this way will come speed. *And he blessed him there.* Such as come to Christ for the blessing, they shall get it, if they hold on resolutely and will not be said nay.

1. We have many certain instances and examples of those who have obtained the blessing this way. Jacob in the text. The spouse, Song iii. chap. The woman of Canaan, Matth. xv. 22. and downwards. See also Lam. iii. 40,—50. and downwards. Would you know how to get the blessing? There is a patent way, behold the footsteps of the flock, not the footsteps of lifeless formal professors, who cannot go off their own pace for all the blessings of the covenant; but the footsteps of wrestling saints, who were resolved to have the blessing cost what it would.

2. We have God's word or promise for it. "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance." Have you got the least hold of Christ, then hold what you have and do not let him go, and you shall have the blessing. A man hath no more in God's covenant than what he keeps and improves for God's glory and his own salvation. Now God does not set down all his children with equal stocks. There are fathers, young men, and babes in Christ. Some get more, some less, but there is a promise of more given to them all, on their holding hand to what they have got. It is God's goodness to many of us, that we get but small portions at once, and that any thing we get we know well how we come by it. It is necessary for our light hearts, that they go not vain; for our careless spirits to make us watch the more. But a little thing with a promise, if it were the least gracious desire after Christ, will be like the five loaves that were miraculously increased in the distribution.

3. It is the Lord's ordinary way, to bring great things from small beginnings by degrees. He could have made the world in a moment, but he took six days. At first there was but a rude mass, which day by day was brought to perfection. Thus the prophet

Elijah's servant was ordered to go and look seven times and then saw only a cloud like a man's hand, but it increased so rapidly that *the heaven was soon black with clouds and there was a great rain.* See how great a work begins, Esther vi. 1. In his works of grace, God observes the same order. The grain of mustard seed, Matth. xiii. 31, 32. soon becometh a tree. The seed of grace springs so leisurely that the springing thereof sometimes at least cannot be discerned in the time, Mark iv. 27. O how low may be the beginning of good, which the Lord will cherish and bring to perfection. "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth."

4. Consider the bountiful nature of God, who will not always flee from them that follow him, nor offer to go away from them that will not let him go, except he bless them. If at any time he seem to flee from them, it is but that they may follow him the more vigorously; if he hold meat from them a while, it is but that their appetite may be the more sharpened. When the disciples, going to Emmaus, constrained Christ, he was prevailed upon to tarry with them, though he made as if he would have gone farther. Thus resolute holding cannot fail of the blessing. For good being of itself communicative, goodness itself cannot but be so. The spouse experienced this, Song iii.

5. None coming to Christ for the blessing ever got a refusal, but they that court it by their own indifference. And indeed a faint way of seeking, is to beg a denial. Our Lord is more ready to give than we are to seek and receive. *Open thy mouth wide,* says he, *and I will fill it.* He loves importunity and cannot deny an importunate suitor. And though some such have stood long at his door, never one fell down dead at it; but their long waiting was always made up by rich supplies of grace at length. The richest treasure is that which lies deepest.

6. Our Lord allows and encourages his people to use a holy freedom and familiarity with him, yea a holy importunity, as he teaches us, Luke xi. 8, 9. *Importunity*, Greek, *shamelessness*. Pinching need makes people shameless in asking. It is not here as among men, with whom a shameless seeker gets a shameless nay say. Nay, they that cannot, will not take a nay say, they shall not be troubled with it. Our Lord speaks a parable there, to excite his people to this holy importunity, to hold and not to let him go till they get a blessing. And it is to our purpose to observe five things from that parable.

1. Our Lord allows his people to come to him at any time. He does not fix them to set hours, but they may step forward at mid-

night, when doors use to be shut, Luke xi. 5. It was a dark night with Job, God had drawn a sable covering over the face of his throne to him, yet faith goes forward and draws it aside. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him. He also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before him."

2. Our Lord allows them to plead the relation of a friend to him, and to affirm kindness on him. This relation of a friend is particularly noticed in the parable, Luke xi. 5. A believer stands in many relations to Christ. Let faith fix on that relation, that will best serve its plea, and procure his welcome. And if he seem to forget the relation, let faith urge it notwithstanding, saying, "Where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? Are they restrained? Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; thy name is from everlasting."

3. Our Lord allows them to be full, very full in their demands, lend me three loaves, ver. 5. Probably this was sufficient to entertain a friend on a journey, who was not to stay long, but let men blame themselves, if they be sparingly dealt with in the Lord's house. We are not straitened in him, but in our own bowels.

4. Our Lord allows us to think no shame to tell of an empty house at home. For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him, ver. 6. The report which faith brings to heaven is always of emptiness; for they that live by faith are always upon short allowance, and never want an errand to the great Steward of the Father's blessings, for one supply or another.

Lastly, He allows us to borrow confidently without one word of paying again. This is plain both in the parable itself, and in the application of it, verses 9, 10. This is the way in which faith trades in heaven without money, for it drowns the soul in the debt of free grace, and can trade in no other market, for no other is fit for the pockets of Adam's bankrupt family.

7. And last place. As importunity is usually in all cases the way to succeed, so it has special advantages in this case, which promise success.

1. Our Lord does not free himself of such as thus hold him, and is not this promising? If a beggar be following and hanging about a man for an alms, there is always hope when he does not put him away. "Our Lord answered the woman of Canaan not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, send her away,

for she crieth after us." But, though silent, he would not send her away, and therefore the woman still had hope, and at last succeeded. He says indeed sometimes to the soul as to Jacob, *let me go*, tacitly insinuating that he will not go without their consent, and if they give it, let them blame themselves. But they will hold long indeed, before the Lord say, *Get you gone*. But if there were no hope, you would soon get your answer. For "afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not."

2. Nay, our Lord commands them to keep the hold which they have gotten. *Strive*, says he, *to enter in at the strait gate*. And is not this promising? I know that unbelief will be ready to shape an answer to the soul hanging on about Christ's hand, and will tell it that God's delay is a denial and therefore the soul may give it over. But it is better to wait on about God's door while we breathe, than to go back to the world to fill our belly with the husks which it affords. Be assured the Lord would not order you to keep your hold if there was no hope.

Nay, it is the Lord that hath given you the hand to hold him, and the foot to follow him. "For every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." If you have any real desire after him and his grace, or the least good motion, it is from himself. And though he should have no regard to you, he will regard his own good work in you. God does not open his children's mouth to put an empty spoon in it; but he that has formed the desire will satisfy it.

Use 1. This lets us see why many fall short of the blessing. They have some motions of heart towards it, and if it would fall down in their bosom with ease, they would be very glad of it. They knock at God's door for it, and if he would open at the first or second call, they would be content, but they have no heart to hang on about it, and so they even let him go without the blessing. The reasons of this are,

They have not the living Spirit of Christ in them, so they cannot follow the Lord fully, Numb. xiv. 24. It is but awakening not changing grace they have, therefore it decays by little and little, as the light after sun set, till it grow to perfect darkness. Their reigning sloth being only covered not subdued, rises again and over-spreads the soul as weeds do a neglected garden. Take a branch and ingraft it, it will keep green a while, but if it take not with the stock it will wither, John xv. 6. Another reason is, there are difficulties in the way to heaven, which their hearts cannot digest. Few see heaven, and why? Ease is sweet, and the gate is strait. They

love gold, but will not dig for it. "The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour." They see heaven afar off, and would fain be there, but there is a great gulf betwixt them and it, and they dare not venture to cross it. Heaven will not drop down into their mouths. Hence finding the fruitlessness of their attempts, they despair of their causes, and therefore set themselves to contrive excuses to sooth their consciences and give it over.

A third reason is, the world and their lusts were never made insipid to them, but still have the chief room in our hearts. Hence when the Lord does not answer them, they have another door to go to, unlike to those who say, *Lord, to whom can we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.* Here they find rest is sweet, and so they sit down, and fall short of the blessing. And thus many part with Christ, as Orpah with Naomi, going back to her gods, Ruth i. 14.

Surely brethren, this is a dangerous case. Well then, beware of it. Learn to wait, to bear patiently, and be resolute. And this brings me to,

Use 2. I exhort you all to hold on. You that have received a blessing, wait on resolutely for more. And you that are going away mourning, take up with no comfort till you get it from himself; and be resolute that you shall never let him go till he bless you. Have you missed him? Have you come short of what God promiseth to his people, what is necessary for your case, what you desired, and what you expected? Go from this place resolved to hang about his hand, protesting you will not let him go, till he bless you. And to encourage you to hold on seeking the blessing,

1. Know that a going foot in religion is always getting. *I said not to the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain.* They that hang on about the Lord's hand, will always get something, less or more. Though you do not get the very thing that you would have, at first, you will always get something in the meantime, well worth all your pains. If you be for comfort, perhaps it may be kept from you for a time: but you are very likely to get a deeper conviction to prepare the way for it. If you be for deliverance from temptation, you are likely to get grace to enable you to wrestle against it. In this way did God deal with Paul. "My grace, said he, is sufficient for thee for strength is made perfect in weakness."

2. Religion is a reward to itself. There is a pleasure in attending wisdom's door. "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand: I had rather be a door keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." There is a sweet peace in the way of duty; yea, the straitest ways of religion have a pleasantness in them. "For her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are

peace." There is a pleasure in seeing the bosom idol on the cross; faith and patience behaving themselves well upon their trial.

3. The more you hold hand to the work in religion, it will be the more easy to you. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up on wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." And if the Lord help you to hold on wrestling, you must not say, that you get nothing by waiting on him. For "in the day when I cried thou answeredst me and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." What makes religion so difficult is our not holding to it, but taking it by fits and starts. The oftener you are at the throne, it will be the easier to seek the Lord. But neglect one occasion, and you will find yourselves more unfit for the next.

4. You will find it easier to hold than to draw. Have you got the least hold of Christ? Do not let it go; if you do, you will increase your difficulty. When people slack their hand in religion, their work quickly opens out, and goes to wreck: but to be resolved to hold fast what you have, will help you to get more.

5. You will find that some difficulties in religion that are like mountains afar off, will be like mole hills when you come up to them resolutely. Thus the women that came to our Lord's sepulchre, "said among themselves, who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great." God will make iron gates open of their own accord to his people that are resolved to be forward.

6. You will certainly get your wish at length. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." The longest and darkest night has a morning following it, and the longest hidings of the Lord's face, from a resolute seeker, will have a blessed issue. Hold on and go the little farther; assure yourselves, that if you have missed your communion, you shall have yet, though the table be drawn, and no more bread and wine upon it.

Lastly, The longer and the harder your wrestling and on-waiting for the blessing be, it will be the sweeter when it comes. "It was but a little, says the spouse, that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth; I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up nor awake my love till he please." The people of God are very apt

to complain of disappointments; but though they are unpleasant meat, they are excellent sauce to an after meal, to make it go down more sweetly than otherwise it would. Amen.

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Galashiels, Saturday, July 28, 1722.

## SUITABLE IMPROVEMENT OF CHRIST THE APPLE TREE.

## SERMON XIII.

SONG OF SOLOMON ii. 3.

*I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.*

THAT this song is literally, although in a continued allegory, meant of Christ and his church, and that it is not all meant of Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter; does the more convincingly appear from the description of the bridegroom as a potent king, chap. i. 12, and yet a shepherd, v. 7. and from the description of the bride as a queen, and yet a keeper of the vineyards, v. 9. and of kids, v. 8.

The words of the text are the words of the spouse, and the scope of them is to recommend Christ, and that from her own experience. And indeed Christians who have experience of religion in their own souls are fittest to recommend Christ to others. In the words we have an account,

1. Of an application which she made to him, in her own distressed case. *I sat down*, says she, *under his shadow with great delight*. In these three things are to be considered, 1. A suitable help in Christ, for her case discovered to her, *his shadow*. She was like a weary traveller out of breath, with the many difficulties, with which she had to grapple like scorplings by the heat of the sun, that was much in need of rest and refreshment. And she beholds him like an apple tree casting a broad shadow under which she might get ease. 2. The actual use which she made of Christ for that end. *I sat under*, or *in his shadow*. By this expression is meant the exercise of faith in Christ, as is clear from Psalm xxxvi. 7. "How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings." Faith is that grace, which by means of the promise discovers Christ's shadow suitable for a weary soul, and by which the soul comes under his shadow and special protection, and interposeth Christ himself between it and the

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