

*Morbattle, Saturday before the Sacrament, June, 1707.*

THE GREAT DESIRE OF THE SAINTS.

SERMON XXIX.

PSALM iv. 6.

*Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.*

HOWEVER all men have the same common nature, yet grace makes a vast difference among them. As it makes difference in their understandings, so, in their wills. Their choice is not the same, but very different as in the text.

In this verse we have the world divided into two parties. On the one side which is the worst, there are many, on the other side not many. Many is a word of comparison, and properly signifies a great number, and because there are degrees in a great number, sometimes it signifies all, Rom. v. 19. Sometimes the most part, Matth. vii. 13. so here. Wherefore those on the other side must be few. So that if it were put to the vote in the world, whether God or the world should have men's hearts, God should be voted out of the world. We have also in the verse something supposed in which the parties agree, and that is in two things. 1. They agree in their sense of defects. Every man godly and ungodly is sensible he labours under some wants. The wicked man in the fulness of his sufficiency is in straits, there is still a void in his heart, even after he hath glutted himself with all he can find in the world. His heart is like the grave, or the barren womb, that never say it is enough. The godly also while here, are still craving, being compassed with wants. 2. They agree in their desire of supplies. The mouths of both are opened, they gape for satisfaction as the parched ground for the rain. The desire of happiness is interwoven with man's nature, and that desire is fresh, even when desire fails in old age.

But there are also some things in which they differ, and these are,

1. The object of their desires. The wicked's desire is creeping, the godly's desire soars aloft; the one desires any good, that is worldly good things, verse 7. like the wild beasts that seek their meat among their feet: but the godly desires the light of God's countenance, that is the favour and sense thereof. The reason of the metaphor is, because the affections of the heart appear in the countenance. The weary traveller does not so much desire the ris-

ing of the sun, as the gracious soul does the light of God's countenance, Psal. lxxvii. 1.

5. They differ in the way which they take to the accomplishing of their desires. The wicked are at a great uncertainty here, *who will shew us?* That is, make us to enjoy. The godly are at a point, they go straight to God with their desires. Carnal men know not what quarter to go to, but try all, like the hungry infant that sucks wherever it comes, and finding no milk in one thing, goes to another, and so on. But the child of God straightway fixes on the breasts of divine consolation. "Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us."

3. In the success of their desires. The carnal man gets not his desire satisfied. He is still saying, who will show us any good, for he is always at the wrong door; but the gracious soul gets its rest taken up in the bosom of the great God. Here it lays itself down and goes no farther. The carnal man is like a traveller that has lost his way in a misty day, when he sees a bush he takes it for a house and promiseth himself rest, but finding he is disappointed there, gets up again and falls into the same mistake, and is disappointed without end. Whereas the godly come to the right door, and continue there till it be opened.

*Doctrine.* It is the great desire of gracious souls to have the light of the Lord's countenance lifted up upon them. I shall,

I. Speak to the case that is here supposed.

II. Consider this desire of the gracious soul.

III. Give the reasons, why it is the great desire of the gracious soul. I am then,

I. To speak to the case that is here supposed, which is, that the saint, the child of light, may sometimes sit in darkness. Hence saith Isaiah, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light." The sun may go down upon the saint in his way to Immanuel's land, a black cloud may overshadow him, and set him down in the valley of the shadow of death, where he may be left to cry for the light to arise upon him. Here I shall first show how far this darkness may proceed with them. And secondly, How can these things be.

First then, How far may this darkness proceed with them.

1. It may go so far with them, that they cannot see to read their evidences for heaven. Sometimes the believer can say My Beloved is mine, and I am his. But when the light of God's countenance goes down on them, they may cry out, "My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord." So that the harps employed formerly

to sing the songs of the Redeemer are hanged upon the willows, because they are now by the rivers of Babel and cannot sing the songs of Zion.

2. That they cannot see above them, nor look up to heaven. Thus the publican would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, *God be merciful to me a sinner.* They may lose their confidence with God, who sometimes could by an eye of faith pierce the clouds, and come boldly before the throne of grace. They may go to God, but they are under the feet of a diffidence, discouragement and heartlessness.

3. The very thing that was their light before may be as darkness unto them. The word of God that was their lamp, the joy and rejoicing of their heart before, may become gloomy and dark; yea, and be turned into terror to them. "I remembered God, says Asaph, and was troubled, I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed." Men are very liable to misapprehensions in the dark, hence an angel with a flaming sword seems to them to guard the tree of life. On its fruit they have sometimes sweetly feasted, but the door of Christ's banqueting house seems now closed; the blunted edge of the threatenings now appears sharp and piercing. Bid them lay hold on a promise, that is to them, like God's commanding Moses to take the serpent by the tail, though sometimes it has been the rod of God in their hands.

4. They may be unable to discern their best friend from their foe: even as the disciples, when they saw Jesus walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, *it is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.* Sometimes the Lord is coming to cure them, and they think he is coming to kill them. Hence the soul is filled with fears, and doubts, and jealousies of Christ, why it is dark, the sun is gone down, and they can see nothing but blood through a dark cloud.

5. The darkness may be such that they may lose sight of their guide; and what a weary case must this be. Sometimes a child of God may be within view of Christ, and a cloud may come and take him out of their sight. Hence Zion is heard to complain, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." Like Heman they think they are remembered by him no more, and are cut off from his hand. Hence they are left sometimes to spend a little time saying, "How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? For ever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?"

6. They may lose sight of their way-marks, and be filled with such confusion and perplexity, that they know not what to do or what way to direct their course, and thus *be shut up, that they cannot come forth.* Former experiences are the believers way-marks in

a dark hour, and sometimes they serve to guide their feet in a dark place. They remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. But sometimes the darkness is so great, that they can get no help of them, Psal. cxliii. 5—8.

7. The darkness may be such that they may quite sit up for a time, and give over duty, as in the thick darkness of Egypt, Exod. x. 23. The darkness may fetter their tongues, Psal. lxxvii. 4. and restrain prayer, Song ii. 14. Either they cannot pray though they would, or they may think it is vain to seek the Lord any more, or that they will but bring more wrath upon themselves.

8. It may be so thick that no ray of light can pierce it, till the sun arise and dispel the cloud. "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; my sore ran by night, and ceased not; my soul refused to be comforted." Discouragement beats back as a brazen wall, all comfort offered to the soul, being like Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they were not. The disease may be so violent, that ministers and Christians may apply suitable remedies, but all the world cannot cause them take effect, till the Lord himself put to his hand.

Lastly, They may be weary of their very lives. "My soul, says Job, is weary of my life: I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul." Hence their very bodies may be neglected and the necessary comforts of life refused. "My heart is smitten, and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread," like Paul's company in the ship, Acts xxvii. 20, 21. And hence a longing for death, Job iii. 20, 21. Sometimes this darkness comes on suddenly, Jer. xx. 13, 14. Sometimes it creeps on by degrees as on Samson. Let us, secondly,

Shew how can these things be.

1. It arises from our corruptions, these cast up mists that intercept the light, the light of the Lord's countenance, they grieve the Spirit of Christ, Eph. iv. 30. When we are well we cannot keep ourselves so. It is difficult to carry a full cup even. Our unwatchfulness, quenching the Spirit, slighting occasions of communion with God, and neglecting means of improvement, bring us into darkness.

2. God will have a difference betwixt the place of the believer's pilgrimage and his eternal home. It is peculiar to Immanuel's land to have no night there, Rev. xxi. 25. And sovereignty challenges a latitude, and will have some in darkness, while others are in light. We are now,

II. To speak of this desire of the gracious soul. And

First, What is it to have the light of the Lord's countenance.

1. It implies a state of reconciliation with God. There is an en-

mity betwixt God and every man by nature. Hence angry words and angry looks, that sometimes look the stoutest sinners out of countenance, spoils their mirth, and makes the wheels of their hearts drive heavily. This enmity is taken away, and the soul enjoys peace with God through Christ, Eph. ii. 14. The flames of wrath are extinguished by the blood of the Lamb. Thus the darkness of a natural state is over, and the true light is come. The sun of righteousness is risen to the believer. They who were sometimes darkness are now light in the Lord. They are all the children of the light and of the day.

2. It implies something more, and that is the Lord's laying aside any special controversy with the soul. Though there is never a breach betwixt God and a gracious soul in respect of its state, yet often in respect of the frame of the soul. Though the sun be up, yet a cloud may overshadow it. Now the Lord may frown on his own people, and sin is that cloud. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a thick cloud thy sins: return unto me, for I have redeemed thee." Now when the light of the Lord's countenance is lifted, the soul may say, "The voice of my Beloved! behold he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills."

3. It implies a communication of gracious influences and an intimation of God's love to the soul. Then the soul is lifted up when the Lord's favour is discerned, and the soul can say with Paul, "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Sometimes Christ says to the gracious soul, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee." It is his voice and they doubt not of it; for this light when it shines so brightly dispels doubts and fears, and like the sun is seen by its own light. The Spirit attests the truth of the word and of the work of grace in the soul. And by this light of the Lord's countenance, the soul can look far back to that blessed hour when the Father and the Son were engaged in making the covenant of redemption, and see itself given to Christ by the Father, and its redemption undertaken by the Son, this in the fulness of time performed and in the time of love begun.

It can also look forward "even to the land that is afar off, to the house not made with hands eternal in the heavens." This light will let them see through the clouds, and behold the many mansions in the Father's house. It will let them see how far eternity of blessedness goes, when the saints shall be ever with the Lord. And though mountains of sin be in their way home, this light will let them see over them. "Iniquities prevail against me, as for our

transgressions, thou shalt purge them away. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." This light lets them see a fulness of merit in him to take away the guilt of sin, and a fulness of the Spirit, to take away the stains, dominion and indwelling power of sin. Let us now,

Secondly, Show they desire it.

1. They desire it above all. This is the chief desire of their souls. "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." All other things are in their esteem but loss and dung, in comparison of this. The world is but a bulky vanity and fair nothing in their eyes. If they had but one choice to make, one petition to put up, it would be this.

2. They desire it so as they would be content with it, instead of all. Carnal men may desire the favour of God, and the love of Christ; but they see not such fulness in Christ, as to be content with him alone. But the gracious soul longing for this, would think itself happy in the enjoyment of it, though it should be stripped naked of all other comforts, and all the world should look down upon it, Matth. xiii. 45, 46.

They have good reasons for thus desiring the light of the Lord's countenance. Their life lies in his favour. "For his anger endureth but for a moment; in his favour is life." Their comfort depends on the light of his countenance. What a melancholy life would the world have without the light of the sun? So would the Christian be without the light of his Father's countenance. His frowns are bitter as death to the gracious soul.

*Use* 1. Of Exhortation. Let this be the desire of your souls, that the Lord may lift up the light of his countenance upon you. Seek this and make it your choice.

*Motive* 1. You cannot otherwise give evidence that you are in a gracious state. If this be not the great desire of your souls, you are on the same side with the world. If God be your Father, you will prize the light of his countenance. Can a child be satisfied though he had the countenance of all the servants about the house, if he have not his father's?

2. It will be but a heavy communion you will have of it, if the Lord lift not up the light of his countenance upon you; if you be not in a state of favour with God, you will but wound your own souls more; if there be a standing controversy still betwixt God and you, you can have no communion with him. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" It is sad to be at Jerusalem and not see the King's face.

3. The Lord will not refuse it, if you be heartily concerned for it. He offers you his favour and grace, Jer. iii. 1—22.

*Direction* 1. Lay hold upon the Lord Jesus Christ, Isa. xxvii. 5. Wash in his blood, Heb. ix. 14. Look to God through the vail of the flesh of Christ. God is a consuming fire. There is fire in his countenance against sinners as they are in themselves, but Christ is as a crystal wall betwixt God and the sinner, through him the light of the fire may come to refresh, but not the flame to burn.

2. Turn from your sins that have provoked him to turn his face from you, Isa. lxix. 2. See that there be no unrepented of lust to stand betwixt God and your souls, Psal. lxvi. 18. If you would have his favour, let these go away. Break your league with your sins, and say with Ephraim, "What have I to do any more with idols?" Amen.

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*Monday's Sermon, Morbottle, June, 1707.*

[The same subject continued.]

THE GREAT DESIRE OF THE SAINTS.

### SERMON XXX.

PSALM iv. 7.

*Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.*

*Use* 2. Of reproof to, and lamentation over those who sit in woful darkness, and have not had the light of the Lord's countenance in any measure lifted up on them, and yet are not affected with it, they are not earnestly desiring it, and pressing after it. If they would speak their minds, they dare not say the great desire of their soul is this, "Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us."

In managing this, I shall

First, Shew you how that this is not the great desire of the souls of many. Secondly, How it comes to pass, that this is not their great desire; and Thirdly, The lamentable nature of this case. I am then,

I. To show you that this is not the great desire of the souls of many. It appears if you consider,

1. That ardent desire that there is in many after the world, and their lusts. "Who, say they, will shew us any good?" They are mad upon their idols. This desire is natural to us, and also it has never been quenched in many to this day. How then can this be

the great desire of their souls. They may as easily bring together the two poles as reconcile these. "If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him."

2. The peaceable life that many have without the favour of God, or the least true ground of hope of it. Are there not many of whom it is true, *God is not in all their thoughts*. "They reign as kings without him," Jer. ii. 31. While others are looking heavenwards, they do contentedly look still downwards to the earth. Many can sleep in a sound skin, and never once examine whether they be in a state of friendship with God or not.

3. The easy life that many professors have of it, their rest being never interrupted, but when at any time they fall into gross and scandalous sins. There are many who, like children, can with pleasure wallow among the sand as long as it holds out of their eyes. They are not concerned for the light of the Lord's countenance. It is a light easily overclouded, and so will require great watchfulness to keep it up, and when iniquity prevails to take it away it will disturb the quiet of the gracious soul. *Thou didst hide thy face and I was troubled*.

4. Persons contenting themselves with the bare performance of duties without finding God in them. Many go with Mary to an empty sepulchre, but few with her come away weeping. They are narrow souls, they seek little and get as little; bread and wine, but no Christ. They never come into the inner court of duties, where they would see the beauty of the Lord.

Lastly, Persons not following their desires with suitable endeavours. Many have languishing desires and faint wishes after the light of God's countenance. They may occasionally say, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." But it is not their great desire, their hearts are not in good earnest set on it, else they would add suitable endeavours to their desires, that is, they would seek it resolutely, as Jacob, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me," Psal. xxvii. 7, 8. But it is with them as Solomon saith, "The desire of the slothful killeth him, for his hands refuse to labour." We are now,

II. To show how it comes to pass, that this is not their great desire.

1. Because they are not sensible of their need of it. Why is not Christ prized, but because the whole need not a physician. Many are in Laodicea's case, they think they are rich, increased in goods and stand in need of nothing. If a man's house were all in flames, if he knew it not, it would give him no concern. "The full soul loatheth the honey comb;" but felt need breaks through every obstacle.



2. Because they have not seen the light. What the eye sees not, the heart receives not. A man that never saw the sun, mid-night and mid-day are alike to him; but the man that has seen the light, darkness is wearisome to him, and he longs till the day break.

3. The world and their lusts were never made tasteless or bitter to them. The gracious soul desires the light of God's countenance, because gall and wormwood have been laid on the breasts of their lusts; and so they cannot draw comfort from them. But as for others if the Lord do not hear them, they know of another, to whom they can go. Hence they sit down and take their rest.

4. Because their hearts were never changed, and the natural bent of their souls, go another way than to God. In the time of a great flood, a river may have several streams, but still the great stream is in the ordinary channel. So grace makes the affections run in a new channel, and the great desire of the soul is after God, though there may be inferior desires after the creatures in time of temptation, but when it ceases all go right again in one channel. Most men have too many pursuits, and so some of them must be neglected; when a wife has none but her husband, then all her desire is towards him; but when she has a great many weeping hungry babes, crying out after her, these arrest her affections and care. Let us now proceed,

III. To consider the lamentable nature of this case. It deserves to be lamented with tears of blood, that there should be such a generation whose great desire is not after the light of the Lord's countenance. It is lamentable if you consider,

1. That it is a sign they are of the multitude that go to destruction, not of the few that are saved: that when the world is to be divided they must quit their place among the gracious, and stand upon the other side with the graceless.

2. That they have never seen the beauty of the Lord, and the transcendent excellency of Christ. Had they seen this they could not have so slighted him. His beautiful face, seen by the eye of faith, attracts the heart, Song i. 3.

That they live unacquainted with themselves, with their own heart's state and case. O what a silly empty thing is man without God! Did they see the evil of sin, and the danger of their state while under it, the favour of God would be their desire.

4. They are busy catching at shadows and let the substance go. The soul of man will always be taken up about something. If it be not going out after God it is going after the creature; and behold what they are doing. "For my people have committed two evils, they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn them out

cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." All these things are uncertain and insufficient, greater in expectation than fruition.

Lastly, This will land them in everlasting darkness, where the worm never dieth, and where the fire shall not be quenched. Where the light shall be down on them irrecoverably through all eternity.

*Use 3.* Of comfort to those whose desire is the light of the Lord's countenance above all and instead of all, and yet they are in darkness and distressed with it. Their souls are vexed and disquieted because the Lord hides his face from them. They have been seeking Christ, but they found an empty grave. To which I would say,

I. It is well that you are sensible of your case, that you are not like Samson, who wist not that the Lord was departed from him. The knowledge of the disease is the first step to the cure. Now there is another thing I would have you to know, and then you will be in a fair way of recovery, and that is the cause of the distemper and darkness, why God hath withholden the light of his countenance from you. And,

1. Consider whether or not there hath been a defect in your preparation to meet the Lord. Perhaps you have not been at pains to prepare yourselves, and so you may wonder more that the Lord hath not made a breach upon you, than that he hath hid his face from you, Song iii. 1.

2. Look that there hath been no sin unrepented of, no guilt lying on your souls, some bosom lust, some of the old leaven, some Achan in the camp, and if so, begin now and remove it, cast it out.

3. Look that you have not sat down on your preparation. When we are secure, we are ever ready to fall. O it is hard for us to do any thing, and not to think much of it. And thus the soul, like the bee, may drown itself in its own work. If so, mourn over it, and go to Christ for pardon.

II. I would say to you, perhaps you complain more than you have reason. The sun does not shine always equally clear, and there are different degrees of light of the Lord's countenance, and if you have had but a fainter light be thankful for it and wait for more. Then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord; "his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto you, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." Sometimes it is with the Christian as with Jacob, when he said, "surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." And this mistake may arise from two things.

1. Because they may feel the storm is not yet entirely blown over, they may be still assaulted with doubts, fears and temptations. The light may be only so strong as to keep them from being over-

come, though it do not presently dispel all their darkness, 2 Cor. xii. 7—9. This is a mistake indeed for the light doth put away the darkness only by degrees.

2. Because it doth not answer their expectations, or comes not in the way they looked for it, Matth. xiv. 26. O how hard is it for us to keep from setting limits to God. If God gives not all our asking, we will not give him a receipt for what we receive. If he comes not the way we looked for, we will not acknowledge that he comes at all. But if any glimmerings of the light of his countenance have come through the cloud into your souls, you will know it by these marks, 1. Where there are any new discoveries made, there is light there. If a man see the motes in his room, he knows the sun is up, though he see not the body of the sun. If you see more of your own vileness, and are more humbled under a sense of the evils of your hearts, that is a sign the light of the Lord hath arisen upon you. 2. Where there is heat it is a good sign. Do you feel your souls enamoured with Christ, that is a good sign. Do you hate sin more and love Christ more?

And though it is not noon day with you as with some others, yet I would have you to be thankful. Because perhaps, it has not been so dark night with you as with them. If you be not lifted up so high as others, perhaps neither have you been plunged so deep as they were. That which will lift up one will not be sufficient for another.

Be thankful also, because it is like you have not such hard work to begin to as they have. God's children will not be permitted to eat idle bread. There is commonly hard work for them that get a large meal. It is observable that they that get the brightest manifestations, get also the hardest services. Remember that sovereignty challenges a latitude. May he not do with his own what he pleaseth. Sovereignty takes one piece of clay and sets it on the throne, dandles one child on the knee, and leads another to heaven by the brink of hell.

III. I shall say this to you, that the desire of your soul shall be satisfied. Fear not, for you shall see the salvation of the Lord, and this I say, on these three grounds.

1. Because that desire has the promise of God. "Open thy mouth wide, says he, and I will fill it." He will fill the hungry. God will not leave his children always in the dark, seeing he hath promised to return. Do you then plead the promise of God. Faith in the promise is the hand turning about the key that opens heaven.

2. That desire is of God's own implanting. It is not a flower that grows in nature's garden, and since he has given it, he will ac-

compish it ; for he hath not given it in vain, nor only to torment the creature. Nay it is a great mercy in itself, and so is a pledge of further mercy, Hos. ii. 14.

3. The Lord never altogether frustrated such desires. They will be importunate and resolute, and the Lord refuses none such, Luke xviii. 1—8.

*Use* 4. Then they are richly privileged on whom the Lord has lift up the light of his countenance. I hope there may be some who came sorrowing, and are going away rejoicing. The Lord hath lifted up the light of his countenance upon them, and the wounds of their souls are healed. "But unto you that fear my name, saith the Lord, shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings, and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." Orders have been given and the prisoner is set at liberty, by a broad view of the righteousness of the Mediator, Job xxxiii. 23, 24. Now sirs, many have desired to see the things which you see, and have not seen them, therefore be thankful to the Lord, and acknowledge his goodness. Let the high praises of God be in your mouth all the day long.

Again, Walk humbly. Keep low sails. Though you be adorned like the dove, with shining feathers, yet look to your black feet, your black heart, and walk softly.

See also that you walk watchfully. Satan will attack you, to rob you. A rash word, and a vain thought, a carnal laughter may be a door to admit the tempter to rob you of your enjoyment.

Be making constant application to Christ, and glory more in himself, than in his gifts.

Lastly, Walk as a child of light, walk tenderly, and do good to others. Walk prudently and tell your experiences, especially to the indolent Christian, "for as iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend." Tell them also to the distressed Christian. "When thou art converted strengthen thy brethren. For this shall every one that is godly, pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters, they shall not come nigh unto him." Tell them also to those weak ones who withdraw from our communion. If they would believe that Christ keeps communion with us, they would be tender of separating from us. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, in those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, we will go with you; for we have heard, that God is with you." Amen.