

may enter; so was Joseph's prison, and Daniel's den. A debt may be paid either with money, or something equal in value. If God do not take away the trouble, but give strength to bear it; if he remove not sickness, but remove the sick saint to heaven, he is no loser.

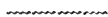
USE 2. A word to all. Go to God for your help in all cases. Let God be your helper. Consider,

1. You have many and strong enemies. You are not able to grapple with Satan, the world, and the flesh. These will ruin thee, if God help thee not.

2. He is a present help. He is not far off. He is within hearing of your cry. Men may perish when help is far away.

3. He is willing.

4. He is able to help thee in all cases, and at all times. When friends can do nothing but close the eyes, and prepare the funeral rites, Christ can take thy soul to his Father's glory, and present it there with exceeding joy. Amen.



Swinton, July 28, 1706, Sermon after the Action.

MOURNING THE ABSENCE OF CHRIST.

SERMON VII.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 49, 50.

Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission, till the Lord look down and behold from heaven.

WONDER not, that upon this occasion, we have read a mournful text to you; for I suppose if every one of us were taking liberty to express the affections and present frame of our hearts, it would be as Ezra iii. 12, 13, "when some wept with a loud voice, and many shouted aloud 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 among us, some would weep, and some rejoice; and in the meantime, others would stand as unconcerned spectators, who have not found Christ, and therefore cannot rejoice; and do not feel the want of him, and therefore cannot lament after him. Yea, perhaps, some would be found, who with one eye would look joyfully, because they have got so much; and with the other weep, because they have not got more. But alas! it is the misery of many that they are too soon

pleased. They may begin in the course of mourning with the church here, but cannot hold up with her, but stand still, long before "the Lord look down and behold from heaven," and so lose the things which they have wrought. In the text we have,

1. The church's present exercise, and that is mourning. The ground of her mourning was guilt and heavy affliction, chap. v. 16. Her grief was great, "mine eye trickleth down." Her sorrow was such as if her eye had been turned into a fountain of tears, and her head into waters. It was lasting, it ceased not: It was not for a fit and away again, and so ended; but it was without intermission, a continual sorrow.

2. The term of the continuance of this exercise. "Till the Lord look down, and behold from heaven." She would take no comfort till the Lord should give it to her. She was seeking the Lord sorrowing, and her eyes cannot dry till she find him. It was the light of his countenance only, that could restore her joy. She was resolved her cry should be continually going to the throne, till he that sits upon it, should look in mercy on her, and deliver her.

DOCTRINE.—As it is the duty, so it is the disposition of the godly, exercised under the hidings of the Lord's face, not to give over, nor to sit down contented, till such time as the Lord be pleased to give them a favourable look. We see it thus with Jacob. He said to God, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Gen. xxii. 26; Hosea xii. 4. And the woman of Canaan. Matt. xv. 22—28. I shall here.

I. Shew what this imports.

II. Give reasons why they are thus disposed. I am then,

I. To shew what is imported in this. It imports,

1. That a child of God may be under the hidings of God's face. When it is said, "till the Lord look," this imports that the Lord refused to look on them for the time. "Thou didst hide thy face," says David, "and I was troubled." God will have a difference betwixt the upper and lower houses. When the saints are above, all the shadows flee away, but now clouds may intercept the light of his countenance. This implies that a controversy is apprehended betwixt Christ and the soul. The soul conceives the Lord is angry, for the turning way of the face is the way how we signify our displeasure. When the Lord turns his back, conscience turns its face to the soul, and tells that the Lord is displeased. And O! how bitter must God's anger be to that soul that knows him. Is his favour sweet as life, then his anger must be bitter as death. It implies also an apprehension of the Lord's laying aside any special concern about them. I do not say but it is a mistaken ap-

prehension, but sure such a thing is here implied; for the wife will be ready to think that her husband has forgot her, when he locks up himself in his chamber, and does not give her a look through door or window. This was David's exercise when he said, "How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" This was Zion's conclusion, though she was mistaken, Isa. xlix. 14, 15. The children of God may be under that apprehension, that their high priest hath let them out of his mind, though he remembers them still, and doth them many good offices, which they know not, till afterwards. But it is so long between visits, that they think he hath forgotten them.

2. It imports that the hidings of the Lord's face, may continue long with a child of God. The tears for his absence, may trickle down long, ere he come and wipe them away. "I am afflicted," says Heman, "and ready to die from my youth up." Sovereignty hath the disposal of the time, and sometimes may prolong it, so as it may appear a kind of eternity. Hence such complaints as, "the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." God will have his people's faith and patience tried, and therefore makes their clouds return after the rain.

3. A holy dissatisfaction with all things, while Christ hides his face. The soul is difficult to please when the Lord is gone. Nothing will stop the fountain of tears here, till the Lord look down from heaven. The word will not please them, and ordinances will not please them, without him, Psal. vi. 6, 7, and xxvii. 4. An angel's presence could not satisfy Moses, Exod. xxxiii. 15; nor dry Mary's cheeks, while her Lord was taken away. Their life is bound up in his favourable looks, and as Rachel weeping for her children, refuses to be comforted, because they are not, so they cannot be comforted till he return:

4. A wearisome longing after the Lord, Job vii. 2, 3; and xxiii. 3, 4. The soul is looking for his appearance, as the traveller in the night longs for the day-breaking. Most of the causes of weariness concur here, as solitude. The wife lives but a solitary life, when the husband is from home, though the house be thronged with servants; so does the child of God, while the Lord hides his face. Darkness also causeth weariness. It is a pleasant thing to behold the sun; but now the Sun of Righteousness hides his face, and it is a dark hour with the soul, Job xxix. 2, 3. Here also there is some toil. A time of desertion, is a toilsome time to the people of God. "I am weary with my groaning," says David. Duties are hard work, when Christ withdraws. Labour in vain much more causeth weariness. Hope deferred makes the heart sick. Sometimes they

no sooner call but God hears, then they need not weary. O but to be standing alone, in the dark hour of the night, trying to break up heaven's gates, to get corruptions mortified, and temptations overcome, and all without felt success, how wearisome must that be? A man's not seeing the end of his work, makes weary work. It refresheth the labourer, to think that when the sun goes down, he will go to his rest; but the people of God, in this case, see not their signs, nor know the time how long. They know not what hour of the night it is, and how long it will be till day-break. Finally, continued disappointments from every quarter, from which the soul expects ease, makes weariness in full measure. Job. xxiii. 8, 9; Jer. viii. 15.

5. Some hope that the Lord will yet look down, and behold from heaven, Psal. xliii. 5. Should they lose all hope, they lose all. It is true their hope may be very low: yet likely they will be able to say, who knows but he may return and leave a blessing behind. Sometimes they may draw hasty and heavy conclusions against themselves, but hope will yet set up its head, and make them say with Jonah, "yet I will look again towards God's holy temple;" though it may be sometimes sunk, but all is not lost that is in hazard, Lam. iii. 18—21. Hope feeds those weary labourers, and God never allows his people to sink so low, but everlasting arms are still beneath them, to keep them from falling to the bottom.

Lastly, A resolute persisting in duty till the Lord return: The soul resolves never to give over, and so holds on, till the Lord look down and behold from heaven. Sense may often bring bad news, and tell them they have already got the last look of him, but the soul is resolute, and will not give over. If it must die, it resolves to die in the bed of honour, even at the Lord's footstool, and to dig its grave at his door. We now proceed,

II. To give some reasons why they are thus disposed. I shall offer only these few.

1. Felt need of Christ engageth them to this course. You know what determined the lepers that sat at the gate of Samaria. Many see a want of Christ, that feel not their need of him; hence a few cold wishes, and if that will do, well and good; but if not, they must even live without him. But the gracious soul cannot live without him. They say with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. Now, necessity hath no law, and hunger will dig through stone walls. And if it cannot dig through them, it will leap over them. The soul still cries, Lord help me.

2. Superlative love to him, engageth them to this, Song viii. 6, 7. Love can endure any thing but absence, or the loss of the beloved party. Christ hath appeared in his beauty to the gracious soul, and hath captivated his heart, and it is so fixed with the sight of his transcendent excellency and fulness, that he cannot take it back again. The eyes of the soul are opened, and can see no happiness in any other. But in the meantime, the soul cannot cease to desire to be happy, and therefore can never rest, till the Lord look down, and behold from heaven.

USE 1. Hence we may see why so many professors fall short of Christ. They are utter strangers to this disposition of the godly. There are many who have not so much sense as to complain of the Lord's distance from them, because their consciences were never so much touched with any notable common work of the Spirit of God on them. There are others, whose character may be that, "ever learning, and never coming to the knowledge of the truth," they have some movings upon their souls, and they complain; but their complaints are dead, heavy, and inactive. They may at a communion or so, have something like mourning after the Lord, but all their exercise is like a slight shower, that wets only the surface of the earth, which a little wind presently dries up, ere it can do any good. The concern of their souls for Christ does not last till, but is gone, ere the Lord look down, and behold from heaven. Reasons of this are,

1. They have not the living spirit of Christ in them, and so they cannot follow the Lord fully. Numb. xiv. 24; John iv. 14. It is but awakening, and not changing grace they have; therefore it decays by little and little, as the light after sunset, till it grow to perfect darkness. Their reigning sloth being only covered, not subdued, rises again, and overspreads the soul, as weeds do in the spring. Take a branch and ingraft it, it will keep green a while; but if it do not take with the stock, and unite with it, it withers. "If a man," says Jesus, "abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered."

2. 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 they cannot exert themselves to 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 gulph between them and it, that they dare not venture to swim. Heaven will not drop down into their mouths, hence finding the fruitlessness of their attempts, they despair of mending their case, and then sit down to contrive ways to smooth their consciences.

3. The world and their lusts were never made sapless to them, but still have the chief room in their hearts. Hence, when Christ will not answer, they have another door to go to. They are unlike those who said to Jesus, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." They find rest is sweet, so sit down, and fall short of Christ. They are like a wife called to go forth and meet her husband; but her children, in whom she delights, cry after her, and hold her still. And thus many part with Christ, as Orpah with Naomi.

USE 2. You are in earnest for Christ, yet under the hidings of his face, and all things else insipid to you without him, you see here how you are to behave; you must hold on seeking till the Lord look down from heaven. Take up with no comfort in the world, till you get it from himself, and from his blood; and be resolute that you will never give over till he look down from heaven, and be sure you shall get a healing look from the Lord. "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" Have you missed him, have you come short of what God promiseth to his people; of what is necessary to your case; of what you desired of him? then go from this place, resolved to hang about his hand, and to cry for it till you obtain it; protesting that nothing shall satisfy you, till the Lord look down and behold from heaven; and be sure you shall get your communion yet, though the table be drawn, and no more bread and wine on it.

OBJECTION 1. I dare seek him no more, guilt so stares me in the face, that prayer is a terror to me. ANSWER, This is a fit of indisposition you are under, and sometimes Christians are carried away with it. But if you belong to Christ, you will even take up with prayer again, seeing yourself the greater fool, that ever you laid it aside, if it were ever so short a while. But O hear what Christ himself says to you. Song ii. 14.

OBJECTION 2. But I am burdened with a hard heart, I cannot mourn after the Lord; could I seek him to purpose, I would have hope that he would look down, and behold from heaven. I fear he has nothing to do with me. I see I am all wrong, but I can do nothing to help it. ANSWER I suppose you may find three hopeful things, even in that case. 1. Self-dissatisfaction. There is a secret discontent with yourselves in you. Weak grace is frowning on corruption, though it is not able to master it. 2. Self-condemnation. The man is the vilest creature in his own eyes. He has nothing to commend him to Christ, and he would wonder if he would cast him a crumb; saying, "it is of the Lord's mercies, that I am not consumed, and because his compassions fail not. But to this man, saith the

Lord, will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a broken and a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." 3. There is a spark of kindness to Christ in the heart, though the soul has written the bill of divorce, and put it in Christ's hand, yet the soul would not sign it for thousands of worlds. Well then, if you cannot mourn, will you sigh and groan after him. Rom. viii. 26, 27. If you cannot sigh, will you give him an earnest look. "I am cast out of thy sight," said Jonah, "yet I will look again toward thy holy temple."

OBJECTION 3. The Lord has let me fall into such a gross sin as has wounded my conscience, and I fear he has shaken me off, by letting me fall into it. And whenever that comes in my mind, I cannot think that the Lord will ever look more to me. ANSWER. Have you fled to Christ for refuge. If you have, then your greatest sins may hide God's face, but shall never part God and you. Psal. lxxxix. 30—34, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleauseth from all sin." The Lord has designs of good, even in permitting his people to fall. He raises profit to them out of it. Thus God left Hezekiah, in the business of the Babylonian ambassadors, "to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." It also brings a revenue of glory to himself, by his having mercy upon them. And for your continual disquiet, look that you have not trusted more to your repentance for your sin, than to the blood of Christ, which "alone can purge the conscience from dead works to serve the living God."

OBJECTION. 4. I have met with so many disappointments, that I can scarcely think but I must give it over. ANSWER. You are not the first that have met with them. Job xxiii. Song iii. Disappointments are needful for us in several respects. But if you should meet with one on the back of another, till your dying hour, if Christ come at last, you have no reason to repent your waiting on; and come he will, to them that will not want him. There are three signs when your disappointments may be near an end. 1. When your heart is duly humbled, and you are as a weaned child; when you leave off limiting God; resolving to wait on God, but to prescribe no time to him. "Lord thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." 2. When you get your case touched, and laid open in the public ordinances. "The watchmen that go about the city, found me," says the spouse, "and after this she soon found her beloved." 3. When you are carried above means, to look over them all to Christ himself; even passing on from the watchmen, till you find him whom your soul loveth.

Lastly, My case grows worse and worse, heavier and heavier, and always the longer the more hopeless. ANSWER. Wait on till the

Lord look down. There is hope in Israel, concerning this thing. Men's extremity is God's opportunity, Isa. xli. 17, 18. "For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left." Christ usually times his visits, so that he may be the more welcome when he comes. It is as with Hagar, who never saw the well, till she gave over the child for death. The darkest hour is readily before day-break. Amen.

Ettrick, January 3, 1725.

THE SHORTNESS OF HUMAN LIFE.

SERMON VIII.

JOB xvi. 22.

When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return.

TIME is in constant motion. Years are like rivers flowing fast away, and still running a straight, but no hope of their running a backward course. The year now gone will never return, and that now come will run on, till it also run out. Meanwhile, our life here is also running to an end.

Our text mentions an important removal, that is abiding all. This is, "we shall go the way whence we shall not return." Death is the going to that place, that state. A removing from time to eternity, from the world of sense, to the world of spirits. There will be a return of the body from the grave, but no return from eternity.

We have also the longest term fixed for this removal. It may be within a few months, weeks, days, hours, that we shall be called away. But without all peradventure, the term of removing will be to all of us within a few years. "When a few years are come," by that time we will be gone.

DOCTRINE. The coming in of a few new years, will set us out of this world, never to return to it. However vain men make new years, new occasions of renewing their follies, superstitions, carnal mirth, and jollities. They thus act as those in whom madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.