

January 12, 1707.

ON THE DUTY OF PRAYING FOR THE PEACE OF THE CHURCH

SERMON XXXVIII.

PSALM cxxii. 6,

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

THIS psalm seems to have been penned when the ark had been newly brought to Jerusalem, and set up in the tabernacle which David pitched for it. Now it was in a fixed place, after it had been in several places. See 2 Sam. vi. 7; 1 Chron. xv. 17. In the text we have, 1. A duty; namely, prayer. 2. A particular part of the matter of prayer; "the piece of Jerusalem." This city was now in peace, and the continuance of it is to be desired. In Jerusalem now were the tabernacle and the ark, and the solemn assemblies for worship. In this respect it was a type of the church.

DOCTRINE. It is the duty of all church members, to pray for the peace of the church. Let us,

I. Shew what this peace is.

II. Give reasons why we should pray for it.

I. We are to shew what this peace is. It consists in these two:

1. The removal of evils from the church of Christ. Many are the evils to which the church is liable, while here; and therefore she as a city, must have her walls, bulwarks, soldiers, and watchmen. It is Jerusalem above, only, which is past hazard. "The gates of it shall not be shut at all by day, for there shall be no night there."

2. The enjoyment of positive blessings. Her peace includes her prosperity; that she be in a prosperous condition, not standing still, not going backward. "Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces." All kingdoms and states have their revolutions. One while they prosper, another they are in adversity. Jerusalem's prosperity is spiritual. It is produced by the light of God's countenance, and by the communications of his grace. When under these, the children of Zion grow in knowledge, holiness, and comfort, and enjoy all their privileges undisturbed; then Jerusalem hath peace.

II. We are to give reasons why we are to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

1. Because God commands us not to hold our peace, till we see her peace. This command is express in the text. Says God by Isaiah, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace, day nor night; ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence; and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." Therefore the prophet himself, is peremptory as to this duty. "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof, as a lamp that burneth."

2. Because of her relation to the God of peace. This should not only engage us to pray, but may encourage us to hope for her peace at length. The church is confederate with God, in a covenant of peace. She is the house of God. The city of the great King. The object of his special providence. "Behold he that keepeth Israel, shall neither slumber nor sleep."

3. Because of her relation to the Prince of Peace. The church is Christ's spouse, his body, she is built on him, she is his special charge from the Father; and is it not reasonable that the children be concerned for the peace of their mother, and the members for the body to which they belong. The nearer relation any of us have to Christ, the more should be our concern for the peace of Jerusalem.

4. Because her peace is purchased at a dear rate, even the blood of the Mediator of peace. "We are made nigh by the blood of Christ, for he is our peace." Not only her inward, but her outward peace. Will not we pour out a prayer for that, for which Christ poured out his blood?

5. Because she hath many enemies without, ready on all occasions to disturb her peace. The enemy watcheth at her gates, ready on all occasions to break in. The devil has an army of wicked men, constantly in arms and pay, to fight against the church. The war was begun by Cain, but the sword is never yet put up, nor will be to the end of the world. As one race of wicked men goes off another takes up their weapons, and stand in their place.

6. Because she has disturbers of her peace within. There are hypocrites in her bosom, ready to betray the spouse, as Judas did his Lord. There are corruptions in the best; so that Jerusalem is often made to suffer by earthquakes, by reason of what is inclosed in her own bowels.

USE 1. Of reproof to those who are not concerned for the peace of Jerusalem. Some pray not at all. Some are longing to see Jerusalem in confusion, laid in heaps, and her ways filled with mourning. They are so far from praying for the church, that they

would fain make a prey of her, Isa. lix. 15. And seeing they are not acquaint with praying, they will drink her confusion, of which they have more skill than of praying. But if that would have done it, we would have all been confounded long since. Some pray, but Oh! they are not concerned for the church of Christ that is in hazard at this day. Consider that this neglect,

1. Is a sign that you have little or no love to Jerusalem, when you see her hazard, and pray not for her peace. When the dumb son of Cræsus, saw his father like to be killed, his affection to his father loosed his tongue, and made him cry out, that they might spare his father.

2. That you have no interest in Jerusalem, in Christ, and ordinances. Were your stock in a ship at sea, how would you be concerned for her coming safe into the harbour. They that have a lamb in the flock, love all the rest the better. Interest makes a man concerned. The Christian's all is at stake, when Jerusalem is in hazard.

3. You have little or nothing of the Spirit of Christ in you, and they that have not his Spirit, are none of his. The chief concern of the Lord Jesus, next to the glory of his Father, was the good of his church, John xvii. He that toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye.

USE 2. Of exhortation. I exhort you all to pray for the peace of our Jerusalem at this day. The dispensations of providence call you to it. Four things are implied in the exhortation.

1. Be sensible of the danger of Jerusalem. There is no prayer in heaven, because no danger there; and there will be no prayers on earth, where people see no danger. If any think that the church of Christ is not in danger this day, I will more suspect their honesty than admire their wisdom. What sins that ever brought judgments on a church, that are not to be found among us? Leaving our first love, lukewarmness, men's abhorring the offering of the Lord, dreadful profanity, and the like. Matters are at such a pass, that we are like the children of Israel at the Red Sea; go we forward or backward, there is danger, if God do not wonderfully prevent it.

2. Highly prize the peace of Jerusalem. If people do not value it, they will not go to God in earnest with it. We should have such a concern for it as would swallow up our concern for other things; for if God depart from us, nothing will make up that loss. All the wealth of the Indies, is nothing in comparison of the worth of the gospel, or the purity of it.

3. Pray for it. Wrestle with God in prayer about it. Give it a large share in your prayers; nay, make it your very chief business, when you go to God. Pray,

1. For our Jerusalem's peace with God; the church's peace with heaven God has a controversy with Scotland. He is angry with our mother, because of her whoredoms. The evidence of it is our spiritual poverty, occasioned by a decay of trade with heaven, whence all the wealth of the people of God comes. This says our peace with heaven is interrupted, and the reasons of it are palpable, even the sins of former and present times, covenant breaking, unfruitfulness under the gospel.

O! that the nations of Scotland and England were so wise, as to lay to heart the avowed breach which they made with God, and that they are still making. And O that an uniting with heaven were set on foot, by repentance and reformation, and then they might think to unite among themselves on lasting foundations.

2. Pray for the peace of the protectors of Jerusalem. For the queen, under the shadow of whose authority, we have the peaceable enjoyment of gospel ordinances in purity and plenty, Isa. xlix. 23. When the Lord took away our nursing father, he raised up a nursing mother, and disappointed the hopes of enemies. Pray for the parliament, their peace with God and among themselves, in the Lord, 1 Tim. ii. 1. 2. They have need of prayers, especially while such great things are before them, as now are in agitation.

3. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem with her protectors; the peace of the church with the state, Psal. lxxii. 3. Though we have our church privileges from Christ, we have from them the peaceable enjoyment of them. And discord betwixt nursing fathers and the child, is a very dismal thing.

4. Pray for the peace of the temple in Jerusalem; for the peaceable enjoyment of gospel ordinances. They are sad days, when the Lord's people are in such a case as to fear the mingling of their blood with their sacrifices. It is a promise, though not absolute, "Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers." If people have other troubles, yet it is a great matter, when they have the comfort of ordinances left them. Coarse fare may go better down, when people are permitted to drink at the wells of salvation.

5. Pray for the peace of the waters of the sanctuary in Jerusalem; the purity of doctrine and worship, discipline and government. When the fountains are troubled with error and doctrine, idolatry or superstition in worship, corruption in discipline and government, it is a dangerous thing. David notes it as a great blessing, that he was led by the still waters, where the sheep need not be afraid to drink.

6. Pray for Jerusalem's peace with herself. Pray that the watchmen, the ministers, may be in peace among themselves. The darkness of the day, and of the duty of the day, creates hazard here. Bless God for what peace and harmony yet appears, and pray against division among them, and amongst professors, the daughters of Jerusalem. O! it is sad, when it comes to that, I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos. Division eats out the life of religion. When the ship splits, the passengers must needs be in hazard. Christ prays for their union, John xvii. 21; and the devil labours to break them, that he may destroy the church.

Lastly, Pray for the peace of the nation in which Jerusalem is. Pray for the peace of Scotland; for if judgments come upon the land, they usually begin at the house of God. I will pray you to comply with this.

1. For your brethren and companions' sake. Look about you, and as many men and women as you see, you have so many motives. Some of them have got grace, and they must cleave to Christ, whatever be the hazard. But O! it is a sad sight to see Jerusalem laid on heaps, Psalm lxxix. 1—3. Some are but weak, and will faint under trials, and wound their consciences. Others have no grace, and how will they get it, if the doors of the sanctuary be shut. Look on your little ones. Pity posterity. What will become of them, if the gospel go away? What came of our forefathers, who were born and brought up under popery? What were they obliged to their fathers that sinned away the gospel? What would have come of ourselves if God had not overturned popery and prelacy in this land.

2. For Zion's sake, Isa. lxii. 1. For the house of God's sake, Psalm cxxii. 9. Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities. See how your hearts could bear to take your leave of it. Ordinances are the glory of the land. What a dismal business would it be to see our sermons and communions gone; darkness instead of divine light; the children fainting, and none to break the bread of life to them. This should prevail with us all, for there is none of us but are accessory to the disturbing of the peace of Jerusalem. This made it lie near old Eli's heart. If you had a friend in hazard of death, would you not be concerned for him; especially, if you had a hand in casting him into the disease.

Lastly, For God's sake, and for Christ's sake, Psalm cxxii. 4, 5. How can you think that God should be robbed of the honour of the assemblies of his people; that Christ's throne in the land should be overturned, and that enemies should blaspheme his name.

4. It imports the use of means, in order to attain the peace of

Jerusalem. We must not only pray for it, but also live for it. The means then are repentance and reformation, Lam. iii. 40, 41. Many projects have been, and are set on foot to bring this land out of the low state into which it is brought. But alas! the main point of all is little regarded, and that is repentance and reformation. Till this be, it will be but building on sandy foundations, unless the Lord mind to give us meat to our lusts, but leanness to our souls, which God forbid.

Let us resolve then with the zealous Israelites in Babylon, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." Amen.

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 March 16, 1707.

DUTY AND ADVANTAGE OF SOLEMN MEDITATION.

SERMON XXXIX.

GENESIS xxiv. 26,

*And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even tide.*

MAN is a social creature, and made for society, to converse with God, with himself, and with others. But as he is a bad householder who is always abroad, never to be found at home; so he is a bad Christian who is always at home, who is not sometimes retiring from the world and conversing with God and himself in the duty of meditation, by which the soul is set to its most proper work. We have in the text,

1. The duty to which Isaac set himself; meditation. It would seem that it was his ordinary practice. He had a good father, and a good education, and the grace of God in his heart; all which contributed to this practice. The word signifies to pray as well as to meditate; and they mingle well together, for meditation is to be mixed with prayer.

2. The time which he chose for this purpose. This in general, was when the weighty affair of his marriage, was in hand. Unlike to many who, at such a time, are least serious. But surely he knew how much of his happiness depended upon a right match, and this