

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.

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*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.

I see not how serious persons can fail to have this serious thought on such an occasion. Here I shall very shortly,

I. Shew in what respects, we can have but a few years to come.

II. Why is the coming, and not the going of these few years mentioned.

III. When the few years have sent us off, there is no returning. We are then,

I. To shew in what respects, we can have but a few years to come.

1. In comparison of the many years to which man's life did sometimes extend; namely, in the ages before the flood, Gen. v. When man's life was of that great extent, an ill use was made of it; and Enoch, the best man of that period, had the shortest life, namely, three hundred and sixty-five years. Now our years are dwindled into so small a number, that the odd number even of Enoch's years, is a long life with us, which few comparatively, reach.

2. In comparison of the years of the world that are past, now about five thousand, seven hundred and twenty-four. If we consider what of the world's time was run before we knew it, how late incomers we are, and how soon we must be gone, we must needs say, we have but, at most, few years to come. Our life is but a short visit made to the world of sense.

3. In comparison of the great work which we have to do, namely, our salvation, and generation work. If we were to live hundreds of years, we have as much work laid to our hands, as might fill it all up; and we would be convinced of that, if once we would rightly consider, that we have both our own souls to attend to, and to be useful for God in the world.

4. In comparison of eternity. If our life was lengthened out to a hundred times the length of the ordinary period of it, it would be no more in that case, than a drop of water to the ocean, or a grain of sand to a mountain. How few then must our years be, which we probably have to come. But let us inquire,

II. Why is the coming, and not the going of the few years mentioned.

1. Because, that by the time they are fully come in, they are gone out; so that the coming and the going of a year, are all one upon the matter. It is not one or two, or a month, or eleven months of days, that make a year; till the last day and hour of a year is come, and then it is gone by that time. How quick is our time, then, in its motion; how soon do our years pass, which no sooner are come, than they are gone again.

2. Because that year will at length begin to come in, which we will never see the going out of. Every year is that to some, and to which of us, this year may be it, who knows. But in the ordinary course of providence, it cannot fail to be so, to some or other of us, in the place. The term of the year should certainly suggest this serious thought to us. We are now,

III. To shew that when the few years have sent us off, there is no returning.

1. Men cannot come back, Job. xvi. 14. If men cannot keep themselves alive, far less can they restore themselves to life, and return after death hath carried them away. Nothing less than an omnipotent hand can loose the bands of death, make up the ashes into a body again, and re-unite the soul to it. And,

2. God will not bring them back again. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." God has appointed this life for the time of a trial, when it is ended, the sentence is passed, and no place remains for a new time of trial. With respect to the godly after death, their souls are at rest with God, in heaven; their bodies rest in the grave, sleeping in Jesus. He will not pluck them out of their rest. As for the wicked, they have had their time, and it is out, the sentence is passed, and there is no reversing of it. For improvement,

Let the going out and coming in of years be so noticed and improved by you, as that you may apply your hearts to wisdom on that occasion. I cannot think that the observing of such a time in the way of carnal mirth, feasting, and giving of gifts and handsells, is becoming Christianity. It is certain that was the manner of the heathens; and it is as certain, that God strictly forbade his people to symbolize with the heathen, and follow their customs. "You shall not," said he to them, "walk in the manner of the nations, which I cast out before you; for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them." But it appears very proper in such a time,

1. That men seriously weigh with themselves that they are now a great step nearer another world than they were. A year is a very considerable part of one's life, for there are not many of them in our whole life. And if you be in case for passing into another world, you may lift up your heads with joy, "for now is your salvation nearer, than when you believed." But, hearer, if you be not, you should be stirred up the more to make ready.

2. That they take a humbling back-look of their way, and consider, the many wrong steps which they have made in their past years, and particularly in the year last passed. The way of provi-

dence towards them in it ; what mercies, what rods, what deliverances they have met with, and what improvement has been made of them. Taking up resolutions, in the strength of grace to walk more closely with God in all time coming.

3. That they renew their acceptance of the covenant, and lay down measures for their safety in another world, what time soever their few years shall come to an end. That is, that in prospect of their going out of the world at the time appointed by God, they do what they would do, if it were told they should never see the end of the year. Ezek. xlv. 18—21. And it would be proper to take a particular time for this, shorter or longer, for the more solemn managing of the work. None should bind themselves to any time to which God hath not bound them ; but it were good to take the time most convenient for the work.

1. Consider how many years have gone over our heads, and how short way our business for eternity is come, nay, with many of us it is not yet begun. They who have a long journey before them, and have loitered in the morning, had much need to mend their pace, when the day is far spent. For every seven years any of us have lived, we have had a whole year of sabbaths. And at this rate, several years of Sabbaths have passed with most of us. But how unprepared are we as yet, for the eternal sabbath in the heavens.

2. How quickly do years run out, and make no stay. They pass like a tale that is told. And if we have more years yet to come, these that are to come, will post away with no less speed than those that are now gone, and will never return.

3. We know what is past, but what may be to come, we know not. The lower end of our sand glass of time is within our view, and we see what is run out. But the upper end is covered to us ; we know not how much, or how little remains to run.

4. Our years once gone, there is no bringing them back again. If our work has been neglected in them, it must lie for ever undone for them ; and we must either do and make up the former neglect, by improving the present opportunity, or we are for ever ruined.

*Lastly*, Eternity is a business of the greatest weight. It is that in which we, and the world itself too, will together be swallowed up. The great glass of time for the world's duration, was set up in the beginning, Gen. i. It is not to be turned for this world, but when it runs out, the world ends : and we may be sure it is towards the end by this time. Now the happiness of the other world is too great for us to be indifferent about it, and to be cheated out of it by Satan and our vain hearts. The misery of the other world is too great a burden to be easy about, while we are not secured

against it. The punishment of loss, and the punishment of sense, are things which require our utmost care and concern to escape. The eternity and unchangeableness of these things, add immensely to their weight. There is no change there for ever. But once happy, happy for evermore; and once miserable, miserable for evermore. Finally, when it will come upon us, we know not. Our few years being come, then we go, and shall know in our experience what that is, about which we have so often heard so much. Amen.

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A HEART EXERCISED UNTO GODLINESS, NECESSARY TO MAKE A GOOD MINISTER.

SERMON IX.

1 TIMOTHY iv. 7,

*And exercise thyself rather unto godliness.*

Two things are necessary to make a good minister of Jesus Christ; namely, sound doctrine, and a holy godly life. A good minister is one nourished up in, or with the words of faith, verse 6. He does not only hold forth the breasts of the word to others, but sucks them himself, and grows by them. The apostle will have Timothy to study a holy accuracy in both these; so to hold by the words of faith grounded on divine testimony, as to refuse all profane and old wives' fables: that is all impertinent discourses that have no foundation in the word of God, and have no tendency to the promoting either of faith or holiness. These he doth in contempt call old wives' fables, which, whether true or false, are yet unprofitable and profane; or impure and muddy, unworthy of the heavens and stars, according to the notion of the word; and therefore, as a Greek, not to be brought to the temple. In the text he calls him to the diligent study of true godliness, in which,

1. Consider the connection. And, or but exercise thyself rather unto godliness. The refusing of the one, and embracing of the other, must go together. There is an opposition betwixt the two. Such impertinences may nourish men's lusts, but cannot feed their souls in godliness. There is no suitableness in them for that end,