

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

sent him to God. In particular, at the even tide; in the afternoon, sometime toward night; when, perhaps, his ordinary business was over.

3. The place; the field, where he might be alone, free of the din and noise of the family; for the heart of man is easily drawn off, therefore he goes alone. Thus, also, with the refreshing of his body, he joined the working of the heart. In the field, he had the broad view of creation laid before him, to help his meditation, and to excite all his powers of devotion, Psalm viii. 3, 4.

4. A dispensation of providence he met with, when at this duty. "He saw, and behold the camels were coming." Some observe here, how ready some worldly business is to call us away, when we are at our duty. It is true, however, I think this was a sign of God's accepting of his duty; and O how sweet is it, when a mercy coming to us, finds us at our duty. I think we may say to it then, as Jacob to Esau, at their meeting, "I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God."

DOCTRINE. Meditation is a necessary duty, to the performance of which, people should set themselves; seriously making choice of such times and places for it, as the duty may be gone about with the best advantage.

I shall first explain the duty, and then apply the subject.

I. I am to shew what meditation is. It is twofold. 1. Occasional; which is a meditation of some spiritual thing arising from such occasions as offer themselves, and is of such a nature as ejaculatory prayer, a short occasional thought.

II. Fixed and solemn; when the soul deliberately sets itself to think upon some spiritual thing, in order to the bettering of the heart thereby. This is the meditation in the text, in which three things are to be considered.

1. A choice of some spiritual subject to meditate upon. Many meditate upon sin with delight, and so ride post to hell with little din. "He deviseth mischief upon his bed, he setteth himself in a way that is not good: he abhorreth not evil." Others employ their thoughts, only in the meditation of things of the world. But he that would meditate aright, must choose some spiritual subject to think upon. And it is needful we should select some one, and not abide in generals, Psalm lxxiii. 6; Song i. 4.

2. A calling in of the heart from all other objects. The mind of man is too narrow to be taken up to purpose about many things at once, especially with thoughts of divers kinds; therefore prays David, "Unite my heart to fear thy name."

3. Employing the heart on the spiritual subject so chosen, to think upon it, study it, and seriously consider of it; to lay it before our understandings, so as to move our affections, and improve our hearts.

II. Let us apply the subject. I exhort you to make conscience of this duty of meditation, and particularly of fixed meditation; setting yourselves as solemnly to it, as to prayer and other duties.

MOTIVE 1. Consider it is the command of God. "Commune with your own heart upon your bed." "And meditate upon these things." says Paul to Timothy. Why do you perform other duties, but because God commands you? Well, he that bids you do other duties, bids you do this also. Remember "you shall not be ashamed, when you have respect to all his commandments." If the command of God hath due weight with you in one case, it will have weight in all, James ii. 10, 11.

2. It is made desirable, by the testimony which it hath from the practice of the people of God. Thus was Isaac employed. Thus David, Psalm lxiii. 6. Yea, David puts it in the description of the godly man, "that he meditates on the law of God day and night."

3. It is of notable use for a Christian's improvement. It much increases knowledge: "I have more understanding," says David, "than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation." It is the way to comfort under affliction. When David's enemies plotted against him, "thy servant," says he, "did meditate in thy statutes." It makes a Christian tender in his way. "I will meditate on thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways." It gives a Christian a sweet relish of the goodness of God, Psalm lxiii. 5, 6.

Now I would lay before you some directions, in order to your right managing of this work.

1. Habituate yourself to occasional meditation, to take up a holy meditation on things that you see or hear, turning them to a spiritual use. This was the practice of Christ, to spiritualize worldly things. None have fairer occasion of it than husbandmen, whose calling is so much spiritualized in the Scripture.

2. If your occasions will permit, and sometimes they will, retire by yourselves for solemn meditation, so as you may go about it without disturbance. But sometimes a man may have good occasion for meditation, even while at his employment in the world.

3. Make choice of some spiritual matter to meditate upon. Fix this in the first place, that so you may not be rambling from one thing to another. There is great variety of subjects: God; Christ; his sufferings; the love of God; death; judgment; heaven, hell; eternity; the graces of the Spirit, faith, love, hope; the word and works of God.

4. Begin with a short and earnest prayer; either ejaculatory, or more solemn. Pray as David: "O Lord, open mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of thy law."

5. When you enter on the duty, be resolute to go through with it, for Satan will strive to divert you; and that you may not want matter, take these few rules: When you enter upon a subject of meditation, if it will bear it, observe,

1. To begin with a description of the thing, what it is; as what God, faith, love is; or whatever be the matter of meditation.

2. If there be sundry kinds of these, observe them; as faith feigned, or unfeigned.

3. Consider the causes.

4. The effects.

5. Its properties.

6. Its opposites.

7. What it is compared to.

*Lastly*, Scriptural testimonies concerning it.

6. To think and enlarge on the subject, as that your heart may be affected and touched with it. Here I would advise you: 1. To get suitable affection and relish of it in your souls. 2. To bewail the want of that relish. 3. To desire that, of the want of which you complain. 4. Confess your inability to do for yourself what you wish to have. 5. Petition for the Lord's working it in you. *Lastly*, Believe the Lord will grant your request.

7. Conclude all with thankfulness to the Lord, and committing yourself to him.

*Lastly*, Take all outward helps you can, for right managing of the duty; and because the sight of the eyes may divert you, if need be go into the dark, or shut your eyes. And if you cannot get your heart kept, while your tongue is not employed, stand not to speak your meditation any way, so as you be not overheard. The Hebrew word in the text, signifies both meditation and speaking.

To make this more plain to you, I will give you a short meditation on death, enlarged according to these rules.

Lord, gather my thoughts, that I may profitably meditate on this, which will gather me and all mankind into the grave at length; and open mine eyes to see it, before I feel it. O my soul! what is death? It is a dissolution of soul and body; a parting of these two loving companions, which God did unite in the womb. Consider, O my soul! there is a twofold death, violent and natural; and which of them may be my lot I do not know. Each of these may be done several ways. Either this life of mine must go as a candle that is blown out, or else will waste with diseases or age till like a

candle, it die out of itself, when the wick and grease are consumed. But O! what are the causes of death? Why, the cause is in myself. I bear about the seeds of so many diseases, as will cut me off at length, but the first cause of all is sin, that brought death into the world with it. Seeing I have sinned, I must die. And now, my soul, cast thine eyes on the effects of death. How does the approach of this grim messenger fill all the body with pains, make the eyes stare, and the face grow pale; and when he gives his stroke, the breath goes, the soul departs, the body is left a lump of lifeless clay. While friends fall a weeping that the dead is gone, and they will see him no more in the land of the living. But what are the properties of death? Why, it is certain, it is uncertain. It is terrible in its most pleasant shape. It is a way we can but once go; if it once go wrong, we cannot put it right. O my soul! what are the opposites of it? Even life which we now enjoy here, which is sweet; and eternal life in glory, where we shall be liable to no more death. And why should I forget the death of Christ that unstings it, according to that, Hos. xiii. 14. What is death like? To what may I compare it? It is like the blowing out or wasting of a candle. Like the Egyptian jailor, that opened the prison door to the baker and butler, restoring the one to the court, and sending the other to the gibbet. What say the Scriptures? They tell me, "it is appointed unto all men once to die."

Now, O my soul! how terrible is death? What a king of terrors is this? What need of preparation for it? But alas! how little is my hard heart touched with the consideration of this? How little am I affected with this, which I must feel? O that I were suitably affected with it? that I were wise, to consider my latter end! But alas! I cannot command this of myself, I cannot have one serious thought of it! I may as well dig through a rock with my nails, as think to affect mine own heart with it. But, O Lord, to thee I make my request. Do thou give me a heart duly touched with it. Thou hast prepared death for me; prepare me for it. And I desire to believe thou wilt do it, for thou workest all our works in us. Blessed be the Lord, that has opened a way, how we may be delivered of its sting. And so, into thy hands, I commit my spirit. Be my God and guide even unto death. Amen.