

head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.”

2. All inferiority in relations is a situation in which God hath us on our trials for the other world ; taking trial of us what regard we will pay to his authority at second hand. All superiors of divine appointment, being to their relatives so far in the place of God, Psal. lxxxii. 6. So then, since it must be with us eternally, according as we regard the authority of God, or regard it not, now ; and in such inferiority the trial is taken of us, what regard we have to it. We may easily perceive how deep this matter draws ; and for evidence that God does that way take trial of us for the other world, you need but consider that, when time is at an end, all that inferiority of one of us to another is gone, because the time of trial is over, and so there is no more use for it. “ When he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power.” No more subjection of wives to husbands, children to parents, people to magistrates or ministers. The more need, then, while the trial lasts, to approve yourselves to God as reverencers of his authority wherever he is pleased to lodge it.

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*Selkirk, January 2, 1728.*

MYSTERY OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM KNOWN TO BELIEVERS.

SERMON XXIV.

MARK iv. 11,

*And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables.*

As the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God, and the wisdom of God reckoned foolishness by the blind world ; so, in all ages, the one part of mankind hath reckoned the other fools, according as they have followed these different sorts of wisdom. Sinners think saints fools ; and saints know sinners to be fools. Tracing this to its original, it will be found to arise from that very different light in which spiritual things appear to the several parties, as saith the text. In which we have two things :

1. The spiritual privilege of some, with respect to the kingdom

of God: "Unto you it is given to know," &c. By the kingdom of God, is meant the kingdom of the Messiah. That was common style among the Jews in the days of our Saviour, Luke xvii. 20; xix. 11. But they quite mistook the nature of it, and fancying it would be a kingdom of worldly pomp and grandeur, they knew it not when it was set up among them; and rejected Christ as the king of it, because he appeared not in the splendour in which they apprehended the king-messiah would appear. However, Christ, being the Messiah, his kingdom is the kingdom of God. His kingdom was a mystery which they could not understand; but unto some it was given of God to know the mystery; and these being opposed to such as were without, it is plain by them is meant such as were within it, that is, the true subjects of it.

2. The state of darkness and blindness in which others were, with respect to that subject, the kingdom of God. To them that are without the kingdom, who are not the subjects of it, but of the kingdom of the devil, all these things, or the all that concerns that kingdom, is under a veil; as things proposed in a parable, which the hearers understand not.

The scope and substance of these words, we may take up in these four points, upon each of which I would enlarge a little:

I. There is a kingdom of Christ erected among men, which is the kingdom of God.

II. The kingdom of Christ is a mysterious kingdom.

III. It is the privilege of the subjects of Christ's kingdom, to know the mystery of it.

IV. It is the misery of those without the kingdom of Christ, that they know it not, more than a parable which they do not understand. We shall attend to these in their order:

I. There is a kingdom of Christ erected among men, which is the kingdom of God. Here we consider only two things, namely, the erecting of the kingdom, and the extent of it.

1. The erecting of this kingdom. Concerning this, observe three things:

1. The erector of it. He who set it up. That was the Father. "I have set my king," says he, "upon my holy hill of Zion." Therefore it is called the kingdom of God. It is different from his eternal kingdom. The kingdom of Messiah is a mediatory kingdom, of which some men, and not all, are subjects. It is a delegated kingdom, of which Christ is the king by delegation and commission from the Father. To put his title to it out of question, he was anointed king of it, namely, by the Holy Spirit, Isa. lxi. 1.

2. The cause for which it was erected was the recovery of lost

sinners; lost to God, and lost to themselves. All mankind being lost in Adam, God purposed from eternity, by his grace, to save some of them. But the kingdom of nature, founded on the work of creation, and governed according to the covenant of works, could not reach this end. Therefore there was a new kingdom erected, founded on the work of redemption, and to be governed according to the great charter of the covenant of grace. And Christ Jesus having borne the burden of laying the foundation of it with his own blood, upon him was the honour of the crown of it conferred.

3. The time of its erection. It was purposed from eternity. But it is an ancient kingdom, considered even from the time of its being actually set up, which was at Adam's fall. Then Christ entered on the government, and as a king examined, judged, and proclaimed a remission to our guilty first parents, and pronounced the serpent's doom, Gen. iii. 8, 9, and downwards. It has continued ever since, without interruption, notwithstanding the continual opposition made to it.

2. We may consider the extent of it. Here it may be observed, that, in respect of the kinds of jurisdiction, it comprehends the kingdom of grace. All the grace and favours of heaven to salvation, relative or real, that ever mortals may, or shall partake of in this world, are in the hands of this king to dispense. "God hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church." It comprehends also the kingdom of glory, for the glory of heaven is also at his disposal, as well as the grace of heaven; Luke xxii. 29, 30. The kingdom of providence is also under his control; for into the same hands that the Father has committed the government of the church, he has also committed the government of the world, and that for the good of the church. "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son."

In respect of the bounds of the kingdom. It reacheth to both worlds, heaven and earth. "All power is given unto me," saith Jesus, "in heaven and in earth." He administers the government in both worlds, for the kingdom is but one. Only some of the subjects dwell in the upper parts of his dominion, namely, the glorified saints in heaven, and them he rules. "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water." Others dwell in the lower parts of his dominion, namely, the saints on earth, and them he rules, Psal. ii. 8. Nay, the passage between the upper and lower parts of his dominion, namely, the valley of the shadow of death, is part of his dominion also, that you may be sure that his kingdom, as large as it is, is but one. "He hath the keys of hell and of death."

In respect of duration, this kingdom will last for ever, without end. "Of this kingdom there shall be no end." At the great day, indeed, he will deliver up the kingdom to the Father, presenting all the designed subjects of it complete, according to the design of the erection of the kingdom. But he will continue in his kingly dignity and office, without end. "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away; and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

USE 1. Beware then of opposing this kingdom of Christ, by sisting yourselves enemies to him by unbelief and impenitence, opposing truth and holiness. It is the kingdom of God, and therefore shall undoubtedly prevail, and the enemies of it will fall, and fall under a dreadful weight, falling under the wrath of this king, which will grind them to powder, Luke xx. 17, 18.

2. Submit yourselves to the Royal Mediator. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but for a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." Submit to his righteousness, renouncing your own. To his teaching, renouncing your own wisdom. Submit to his government, renouncing your corrupt lusts and affections. His father has put the crown on his head; his mother, also, crowns him the day of his espousals, Song iii. 11; and on your espousals to him by faith, he will account himself crowned by you. We proceed now to the

II. Point. The kingdom of Christ is a mysterious kingdom. A mystery is a secret, or hidden thing; hidden under some outward vail or other, which must be drawn aside, before one can see and discern it. Accordingly, the kingdom of Christ is a secret, a hidden thing; a mysterious kingdom, though among men before their eyes.

1. The kingdom of Christ itself is a mystery. "The mystery of the kingdom." The kingdoms of this world are no mysteries, for the outward shew which they make to the eye, with crown and sceptre, and other ensigns of royalty, plainly discovers to the meanest capacity, at first sight, what they are; and is equal to, if not above their intrinsic excellency. But the outward shew of the kingdom of Christ is so mean and low in this world, that the carnal eye cannot thereby discern it to be a kingdom at all, far less to be a kingdom above all other kingdoms, as indeed it is. And therefore I think it is that Christ says, "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation." It is like a treasure in earthen vessels, a prince in the habit of a servant, not to be known by the outward shew.

2. It is a kingdom of mysteries; "even the mysteries of the kingdom." A constellation of mysteries; many mysteries gathered to-

gether in one; so that there will still be mysteries to be discovered to the favourites of the King, and they will never be fully known till the veil be rent, and the soul be admitted into the holy of holies above.

There are mysteries of faith in it. Mysteries to be believed. We have a cluster of them in these words: "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." The incarnation of the Son of God, his humiliation in his birth, life, and death on the cross; his burial, resurrection, ascension, and sitting at the right hand of God in our nature, are all great mysteries of faith.

There are mysteries of privileges. O what mysterious privileges are conferred on the subjects of this kingdom! The imputation of Christ's righteousness to them, the holiness of his nature, the righteousness of his life, and the satisfaction made by his death; all set down on their account, and their justification and deliverance from the law as a covenant of works by it, are great mysteries. The union of believers with Christ is justly called mystical, for it is a great mystery indeed: the head in heaven, the members on earth in a mean and low condition. They crucified with Christ, so dead, yet living. So as he was in the world, an unknown king; so are they in it unknown favourites, walking under a veil.

There are mysteries even of practice. As great is the mystery of the principles, so of the practice of godliness. Sanctification by union with Christ through faith, 1 Cor. i. 2; Acts xxvi. 18, is a mysterious way of sanctification unknown to the Jewish rabbies and Greek philosophers, an imaginary sanctification in the eyes of all legalists. The life of faith, emptying the man of himself, counting all his doings and sufferings loss and dung; doing every duty in borrowed strength, standing on borrowed legs, seeing with borrowed eyes, bearing burdens with borrowed strength; Christ being all to the man, and himself nothing, is a mysterious practice. Yet it is the life and practice in the kingdom of Christ. "I am crucified with Christ," says Paul, "nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

There are mysteries of providence. Kings of the earth have their secrets of government, kept up from the body of their people. The king of Zion has his secrets of government too, vastly more beyond the reach of the spectators of the conduct. This providence was represented to Ezekiel, chap. i., under the emblem of a

wheel within a wheel, going on its four sides, the rings so high as they were dreadful, and full of eyes. The King's special favourites cast down to the dust, his enemies raised up. John Baptist's head in a charger, the incestuous Herodias triumphing over it. Men going in the way of duty, and the storm blowing hard on their face. Others going on in the way of wickedness, and the sun of providence shining warm on them. The King's dear children singled out to extraordinary afflictions, and so made a spectacle to the world; and rebel sinners treated as the darlings of heaven. These are such mysteries as have puzzled the best of men to unfold; as Asaph, Psal. lxxiii.; Jer. xii.; and upon which the blind world can make no commentary, but such as destroys the text. When they say, "It is vain to serve the Lord; and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts? And now we call the proud happy. Yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered."

USE 1. Take heed how you treat religion and seriousness, in the principles and practice of it. Beware you traduce it not, in your words and course of life, as foolishness; but maintain a solemn regard to it upon your spirits, lest your censures of it be found as those of blind men judging of colours, while you condemn what you do not understand; and lest a fire unblown from a holy jealous God, whom you discern not in the revelation which he hath made of himself in Christ, break out upon you unto destruction. "Now therefore be not mockers, lest your bands be made strong; for I have heard from the Lord God of Hosts, a consumption even determined upon the whole earth."

2. Profane persons are none of those who belong to this kingdom. Drunkards, swearers, dishonest persons, unclean persons, and carnal worldlings, that have not even the appearance of godliness. These are none of this kingdom, for there is no mystery in their case but a mystery of iniquity, proclaiming them to belong to the devil's kingdom, Gal. v. 19.

3. Formal hypocrites belong not to this kingdom. You that are strangers to the power of godliness in the inner man, absolutely unacquainted with the life of faith in your practice and experience; whose religion is a parcel of mere bodily exercises, external performances. There is no mystery in your religion, what is of it appears to the eye. The hidden man of the heart is wanting, and therefore it is naught; "for bodily exercise profiteth little." "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof, from such turn away." We are now,

III. To shew that it is the privilege of the subjects of Christ's kingdom to know the mystery of it. Here consider,

1. The subjects of the kingdom of Christ. Who are they. They are believers, and only believers. All the members of the visible church are Christ's subjects in profession; but it is believers only who are so in reality. They are the only persons "who have been made willing in a day of power;" who have opened the everlasting doors of their souls to receive the King of Glory, to reign in them, and over them for ever; who have been espoused to him, and put the crown upon his head.

2. Their privilege in this point. It is "given them to know the mystery of the kingdom." It is their privilege to be already initiated in the mystery of the kingdom, to have the beginning of the knowledge of it. They have obtained a proper view of the mysteries of faith, of privilege, of practice, and providence, though in the meantime it is but in part. "For now we see through a glass darkly, and know but in part." They have so much insight into them, as keeps them from stumbling at them; and all the wisdom of the world, and human learning, cannot give this much. This have all the saints. "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

It is their privilege, also, to be in due time perfected in the knowledge of the mystery of the kingdom, as far as their limited capacity, enlarged by glorification, can reach. "For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now we know in part, but then we shall know, even as also we are known." The light of glory will enlarge their knowledge to a high degree, that shall perfect their happiness. And whoever learn the first elements of it here, shall certainly get it perfected hereafter, and get over all their difficulties that now remain. "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands."

3. Let us consider how they get the knowledge of this mystery which they have. They get it by the light of the word. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." The Bible is the book of the manner of the kingdom, and unfolds the mysteries of it, as Asaph found in his experience, Psal. lxxiii. 16, 17. The Bible, indeed, is flat, tasteless, and nauseous to many; but to none of the subjects of the kingdom, only to those that are without.

They get this knowledge, also, by the teaching of the Spirit, with the word. "God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." He lets in a light from heaven into the mysteries, and opens the eyes of believers to see the wondrous things. And no advantages of human art can make up the want of this teaching. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." But all the saints enjoy this teaching. "For it is written," saith our Saviour, "in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me." They obtain this knowledge, also, by experience. "O taste and see," says David, "that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him." An unfelt religion, is the religion of them that are without, whose sound principles are like fire painted on a wall; as far from any sanctifying efficacy on their lives, or from burning up their corruptions, as that painted fire is from burning the house on which it is. But the religion of the saints is a felt, experimental religion. They feel the power of its mysteries upon their own souls, and therefore adhere to them, in spite of carnal reasonings against them, for it is difficult to dispute men out of their senses. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," says Paul, "for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth."

USE 1. Come and see, is the only proper way to be satisfied as to the reality and excellency of religion. Philip gave this advice to Nathaniel, and, by following it, he was soon brought to say to Jesus, "thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." Enter yourselves subjects of this kingdom by believing, and you shall know the mystery of it. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Would you have the privilege of subjects, before you be subjects? Or would you know a mystery, before you give yourselves up to be taught? It is the commendation of religion that none disparage it but those who have no experience of it; none condemn it, but those whose blind eyes never saw the merits of the cause. So the day will come that they will retract, at least when there is no remedy.

2. No king treats his subjects so advantageously, so honourably, as Christ doth his. The devil keeps his subjects in darkness, and darkness is the main pillar of his kingdom. Without that, the works of darkness would appear loathsome. Christ brings his subjects into light. He makes them wise and knowing, however other-

wise simple. Kings of the earth will not impart the secrets of their government to their subjects, if it is not to very few. But the Prince of the kings of the earth makes all his subjects acquainted with the mysteries of the kingdom. We proceed,

IV. To shew that it is the misery of those without the kingdom of Christ that they know not the mystery of it, more than a parable which they do not understand. Here consider,

1. Who these are, that are without. All unbelievers are such, who have never opened their hearts to receive Christ by faith. The Jews called the Gentiles by this name. But our Lord teaches that it belongs to unbelieving Jews, as well as Gentiles; and so to unbelieving Christians as well as heathens. Though they are in the church they are not of it, and so are reckoned without; being out of God's family, out of his covenant, and out of the body of Christ.

2. What is it they do not know? The text says, all these things; namely, all that concerns the mystery of the kingdom; the shell, the outward appearance of it is excepted. They know nothing of the other parts of it. All is to them under a veil. Christ the King of it is a veiled Christ to them. They know him not. The gospel, the sceptre of the kingdom, is a hidden gospel to them. The Spirit, the light and life of the kingdom, is an unknown Spirit to them. "He is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him." The ten commands in the hands of the Mediator, the laws of the kingdom, are unknown to them in their spirituality, Matth. chap. v. The covenant of grace, the instrument of government in the kingdom, is an unknown instrument to them, Psal. xxv. 14. The mysteries of faith, privilege, practice, and providence, remain all under a veil to them. Let us inquire,

3. How it is they know it not. Though they know the words in which that kingdom is revealed, they know not the thing itself. As a man hearing a parable in his mother tongue, understands the grammatical sense of the words, yet does not perceive the thing itself, wrapt up in the parable. So is it here. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." They are to them like a lecture of philosophy, in a learned language, to a schoolboy.

They know it not by the teaching of the Spirit. "They are sensual, having not the Spirit." They are strangers to supernatural illumination, and the highest source of their knowledge is flesh and blood, improved by external objective revelation; being strangers to the subjective revelation, the opening the eyes of the mind, Deut. xxix. 4.

They know it not by experience ; and so they know no more of religion than one doth of honey or vinegar, how sweet or how sour they are, who may have heard of them, but never tasted the one or the other.

USE 1. Here see the source of the dreadful inundation of atheism, deism, and contempt of revealed religion ; the source of the flood of irreligion, immorality, and profanity, overflowing all its banks this day. These wretched men are without, and though they have no eyes to see the mystery of the kingdom, they have pride and self-conceit to think that they see through it. Their impetuous lusts need such a shelter, and they know that if there be that reality in religion which they would not wish, they are undone for ever. So they neither come into the kernel of religion, nor desire to come ; but break their teeth on the shell which they cannot open.

2. I exhort all to study the mystery of the kingdom of Christ. Religion is another thing than either the profane multitude, or common crowd of professors take it to be. Strive earnestly to get into the spirit of it now, and to feel its life and power upon your souls. It will be no comfort when in hell, with your eyes open, to say, that you never thought that it had been such a hidden thing. You have clear and strong testimony afforded you from the word of God, and the experience of the saints, that there is a reality in religion ; and that the possession and practice of it are absolutely necessary to your happiness. "For except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ;" "and without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." Trifle no longer, then, with this great and important concern. Give yourselves with earnestness, diligence, and perseverance, to the use of all the appointed means by which the necessary and happy change may be produced in your souls. Pray fervently that "he who at first commanded the light to shine out of darkness, may himself shine into your hearts," by his word and Spirit ; "to give you the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus, and thus make you his willing people in the day of his power." Amen.