

ADVICE TO ZION'S MOURNERS.

EZEKIEL ix. 4.

And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.

[The second Sermon on this text.]

AFTER a particular explication of these words, I observed, "That times of abounding sin are heavy times, times of sighing and groaning to the serious godly, Zion's mourners." Here I endeavoured to give the import of this exercise, and therein the character of Zion's mourners; and to shew why such times are heavy times to the people of that character. And I concluded with a short word of improvement. I shall now proceed further in the application.

USE I. Of information and instruction. Are times of abounding sin heavy times, times of sighing and groaning, to the serious godly, Zion's mourners? then,

1. Our time is a time that may be heavy, and ought to be a sighing and groaning time, and would be so if we had a heart for the duty of the day, being a day wherein "the Lord of hosts is calling us to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth," Is. xxii. 12. Whither can one that is serious look, but he must see matter of mourning? We have had long peace, and a long tack of the gospel, and have gathered much dross, fitting the church or land for a furnace of wrath. Iniquity abounds, but mourners for it are rare.

2. This blots out of the number of the serious godly, Zion's mourners, several sorts of persons, that must be put in another class.

(1.) Those who are so far from it, that by their profane and ungodly courses, of a piece with the rest of the abominations of the day, they afford cause of sighing and groaning to all the serious godly, that know them and their way. These by the text are of the number devoted to destruction; and assuredly they will find it so, if they turn not over a new leaf, and that sooner than they expect. Let them consider the case of the evil servant, Matth. xxiv. 48,—51. "If that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the Lord of that servant shall come in a

day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of; and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." There is a wo denounced against such which will not fall to the ground, Luke xvii. 1. "It is impossible but that offences will come; but wo unto him through whom they come." Sighing and groaning is the necessary duty of the Lord's followers; but sad will be their reckoning who give them cause for it, ver. 2. "It were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

(2.) Those who pride themselves in their abominations, Psal. x. 3. "The wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth." The consciences of men by nature are very untender, but by custom in sinning they come to be seared. Hence they arrive at sinning presumptuously, and with a high hand, and instead of being ashamed, glory in their wickedness. Under the law such were to be cut off, Numb. xv. 30. "But the soul that doth ought presumptuously (whether he be born in the land, or a stranger) the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people." Compare Heb. x. 26, 27. "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." These are to be mourned over. Hence says the weeping prophet, Jer. xiii. 17. "But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride, and mine eyes shall weep sore, and run down with tears."

(3.) Those who make a jest of the abominations of the day, having a certain pleasure in the hearing of them, and improving them to make themselves merry with them. These are fools in God's account, Prov. xiv. 9, for *fools make a mock at sin*; and the practice is one of those found among those who are given over to a reprobate mind, Rom. i. ult. "Who knowing the judgment of God, (that they which commit such things are worthy of death) not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." They must needs be of a disposition mighty contrary to the nature of God, and of his people, who rejoice at the abominable thing which God hates, and the serious godly sigh for.

(4.) Those who shew no concern about them, but give themselves up to a detestable neutrality, being Gallio-like, caring for none of these things. If they touch them indeed in their particular interest, they are very sensible of them, and ready to cry out under them: but if they do them no harm whatever dishonour they do to

God, or reproach they bring on the profession of Christianity, that is none of their business. What is that to us? say they. See how they are characterized by Elihu, Job xxxv. 9, 10. "By reason of the multitude of oppressions, they make the oppressed to cry: they cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty. But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" These are Christ's enemies, as not being his friends: for, says he, "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad," Matth. xii. 30. And they shall fare as these his enemies fared, Rev. iii. 16. "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

(5.) *Lastly*, Those who whatever concern they shew for the abominations of the time, yet are not really affected with them in the sight of God. Though they may spare some words against them before men, yet their consciences can witness they have no serious sighs and groans to spare for them in secret before the Lord, Jer. xiii. 17. forecited. Truly this is a matter that will not do with a flourish of words. God knows the heart: and as the heart is, so is the man.

USE II. Of exhortation. Take a lift of the heavy case of this day and generation in respect of the abounding sin thereof, and sigh and groan on the account of it. Let it be your care to be found among the serious godly, Zion's mourners. And for this cause,

1. Awaken yourselves to a more close walk with God, from the observation of the abominations of the time, Rev. iii. 4. They that are not more than ordinary watchful in a declining time, can hardly miss to be stolen off their feet, Matth. xxiv. 12. "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." As then double gaurds are set where the hazard is greatest, so double diligence is requisite in such a time. Let the abounding sin of the time be like oil to the flame of your love to and zeal for God, to make it burn the more keenly, Psal. cxix. 126, 127. "It is time for thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void thy law. Therefore I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold."

2. Be ye more careful that ye partake not with them, but stand at a distance from all fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, Eph. v. 11. Many make it an argument for their doing so and so, because so many make no bones of it: but argue ye contrariwise, that since so many cast God's laws behind their back in such and such points, therefore ye must take the better heed ye be not carried away with the stream, and that ye must not give religion an outward cast, when it has so many enemies. But hear Christ saying to you, as John vi. 67. *Will ye also go away?* There are many ways how

in such a time people may draw in the contagion of the abominations of others: and therefore ye have the more need to take heed.

3. Awaken yourselves to a due concern for the public honour of the Lord Jesus, saying with David, Ps. lxxix. 9. "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee, are fallen upon me." God is saying at such a time, *Who is on my side?* We have good reason to be on his side, and to account his honour dear to us, who counted not his precious blood too dear for us. When the war was proclaimed by heaven against the earth, he made the peace, becoming Immanuel, God with us. And shall not our souls find themselves concerned to be with him, on his side, in earth's war against heaven.

4. Awaken yourselves to a due concern for the case of perishing souls, and a sinking land, Hab. iii. 16. If ever we knew any thing of the terror of the Lord, we are too easy that way; we have too little bowels of compassion, else we would not shift to take a lift of the heavy case. It is inexcusable negligence and indolence, to confine our care to our own case in such clamant circumstances. This was not David's practice, for when deeply affected with his own soul's fall, he had the case of the church of God at heart, Ps. li. 18. "Do good, (says he) in thy good pleasure, unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem."

5. Contribute your endeavours, in your stations, to your power, to stem the tide of wickedness. "Say (as David did) unto the fools, Deal not foolishly; and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn," Ps. lxxv. 4. Beware of giving countenance in the least to the abominations of the day; but discountenance them as ye have any regard to the souls of sinners, and would not contribute to the hardening and ruining of them; and as ye have regard to your own souls, and would not involve them in the same.

6. Take serious thoughts of the heavy case in your private meditations, Jer. xiii. 17. forecited. Think what a miserable pass the state of religion is brought to, by prevailing iniquity; how the kingdom of the devil thrives, in the midst of Christ's territories, and what, according to the scriptures, and the ordinary method of providence, must be the end of these things.

7. *Lastly*, Carry the case along not only to your family prayers, but to your secret prayers, where ye can lay it before the Lord with the greatest freedom. Let your eye affect your heart there in a special manner, and drop a tear for your own sins, and the sins of others. Yea, it would be very necessary, that, for your own case, and the case of the day, ye would use some times of extraordinary prayer. If you would do so, surely your labour would not be in vain.

I shall give you the following motives to press you to take such a lift of the heavy case of the day.

1. A gracious spirit is a holy and public spirit; and a predominant selfishness, whereby people are set only to satisfy their own lusts, and their care is confined only to their own private interest, is a black mark of an irregenerate state, according to what the apostle says, 2 Tim. iii. 2, 4. "Men shall be lovers of their own selves,—lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." Accordingly our Lord says, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me," Matth. xvi. 24. Whoever can call God Father, their heart's desire and concern will be, that his kingdom come. Whoever is a child of the family of God, and has any interest in the privileges of it, must needs be concerned for its thriving, and for destroying the kingdom of the devil set up against it. Beware of Simon's selfishness, to whom the apostle Peter said, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God," Acts viii. 21.

2. Great is the dishonour done to God by the abominations of this day. God has been a kind and gracious God to Scotland, giving us the gospel, that has been hid from many greater nations: yet abominations prevail, as in a land of darkness. He has continued the gospel long with us; but for all the pains he has bestowed upon us, we are as a vineyard over-grown with thorns, the face thereof covered with nettles, and the stone-wall thereof broken down. "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles, through us," Romans ii. 24. He has given peace, and plenty of the good things of this life, and they are improved against him. The silver and the gold are his, the corn and the cattle, our health and strength, and his debtors we are for every breathing: yet all these are sacrificed to men's lusts, and are used in contempt of God and neglect of him, to the treading his laws under foot, despising of his gospel, and slighting his ordinances. If there is any sense of God's greatness, or of gratitude for so many signal blessings, we would sigh and groan for all the abominations done in the midst of us.

3. Great is the hazard that many a precious poor soul is in by means of these abominations, Rom. i. 18. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." How is Satan at this day driving poor sinners in shoals to destruction? Half an eye may see a black cloud of wrath hanging over many a head of those wedded to some one abomination or other. They cannot sigh and groan for themselves; for either they do not see, and they

will not see, nor believe their hazard, though it be told them; or else their lusts have so got the mastery over them, that they must take their swing on all hazards, saying with those, Jer. ii. 25. "There is no hope. No, for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go." This may excite others to sigh and cry.

4. Great is the hazard of the rising generation from them; they are coming into a sad world, in a fast declining time. And what pitch the generation may be arrived at ere they come up, if a strong hand do not interpose, who knows? The generation now on the stage is become worse than their fathers. The wonders the Lord did for his people when they were in the iron furnace, are by this time much worn out of knowledge: most of those that were witnesses thereto are gone, and a generation is risen up that know not Joseph. The covenanted reformation of this church and land is dropping out of heart and head, by degrees: a religion that has no relation to Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God, is like to take place: and the flood of immorality is like to rise higher and higher. O sirs! sigh and groan for all the abominations of the day, for the sake of the rising generation, that they may not be infected therewith.

5. Great is the hazard of the judgments of God that the land is in by these abominations. An overflowing of abominations is a forerunner of an overflowing of national judgments. Hear what the mourning prophet says, Jer. v. 3, 4, 5, 9. "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return. Therefore I said, Surely these are poor, they are foolish: for they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God. I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God: but these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" And the longer national judgments are a-coming on, the heavier will they be when they do come. And whoso considers seriously the state of the land at this day, in respect of her abominations former and present, all lying together on our head, with the scripture threatenings against such a generation, can hardly miss fearing, that if God have thoughts of good towards the generations to come, a stroke is abiding this land, that as the bodies of some dead have been unjustly and dishonourably used by the living, in pulling them out of their graves; so the carcasses of

many now living may yet come to lie as dung on the face of the ground, Jer. viii. 2.*

6. However many abominations there are that we know done in the land, there are many done no doubt that we know not. The former gives sufficient ground to sigh and groan; and the latter may add weight to that reason. When many abominations break out and are brought to light, as at this day, we may be sure that there are many besides that have never seen the sun. But these are all open to God, and are sinking weights on the places where they are done, and on the land. Compare Ezek. viii. and ix. And they will make them to vomit out the impenitent transgressors.

7. Our sins have had a hand in bringing matters to this pass, Tit. iii. 3; and therefore we are the more concerned to take a lift of the case. We have all mismanaged our mercies, misimproved our day of grace, and, by untenderness one way or other, provoked the Lord to go far from us, and to leave the generation to their swing to go from evil to worse. The conviction of this may press us to sigh and cry for all the abominations of the day: and if any refuse the conviction, be sure they will be made to take with it, nill they will they, when God riseth up to plead his controversy.

8. If ye do not sigh and cry for the abominations of this day, ye cannot escape being involved in the guilt of them, and consequently in the punishment to be inflicted on account thereof. See the text and context. In this case silence gives consent; ye will be held as consenting to all the dishonour done to God by them: for inasmuch as ye do not sigh and cry for them, ye give them your tacit approbation, Eph. v. 11. So the abominations of others will be laid on your score, and yet never make their burden one whit the lighter. And see the doom of the unmarked ones, Ezek. ix. 5, 6. "And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity. Slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children, and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary." Say not then, What can we do? Here is what ye must do, *viz.* sigh and groan on account of these abominations.

9. There will never one sincere sigh and groan of yours upon that

* That the author's apprehensions relating to such a melancholy event were not without some foundation, will appear, if it is considered, that about one and twenty years after the date of these sermons, the carcasses of many of those who were engaged in the unnatural rebellion in 1745, raised against King George II. headed by a Popish pretender, met with some such treatment as is here alluded to: and these were the heirs and successors of those who had so treated the bodies of some of the saints in a former period.

head be lost; God will take notice of every one of them. Hence the psalmist says, Psal. lvi. 8. "Put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?" See what notice was taken of a serious few, whose sorrow of heart for the abominations of the generation they lived in, made them to speak often one to another, Mal. iii. 16. "The Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." The all-seeing eye that takes notice of the least pleasant look his enemies give to abominations done, as he did in the case of the Edomites' envy to Israel, Obad. 12. will not overlook the sighs and groans of his friends on account of these abominations.

10. Sighing and groaning for abominations in a land, is fairer to put a stop to them than ye are aware of, one way or other. Those that sigh and groan for the abominations of others before the Lord, will in the event prove either their best friends or their most dangerous enemies. Prayers and tears are the weapons of the church, and never miss to have effect sooner or later. In a word, the sighs and groans of the people of God lie fair for recovering transgressors from their abominations. Christ groaned, and Lazarus was raised. They lament after the Lord, and the Lord will regard his people's lamentations; and if that Spirit were poured out, we might expect good (Is. lxvi. 8) that way, namely, sinners to be turned from their abominations. But if it should not have that happy effect, it would issue in providence shovelling presumptuous sinners out of the way, as it was in the case of Sodom, and so putting a stop to the current, 2 Pet. ii. 5, 6, 7. It is his people's appeal to the tribunal in heaven, which one may be sure will not lie undiscussed.

11. *Lastly*, Be sure it will turn to your private advantage, go what way it will. They that have a Christian concern for the sinful case of others, it will fare the better of it with their own. Hence David says, Psal. xxxv. 13, "But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer returned into mine own bosom." Thus ye will be amongst God's marked ones in the day of suffering, while now in the day of sinning taking your place amongst his sighing ones. This brings me to another doctrine, which I shall speedily discuss.

DOCT. II. Those to whom sinning times are heavy times, making them sigh and groan, shall be marked for safety (by Jesus Christ) in suffering times.

On this point I shall,

I. Shew the import of Christ's marking his sighing and groaning people.

II. Give the reasons of his so marking them.

III. Deduce an inference or two.

I. I am to shew the import of Christ marking his sighing and groaning people. It imports,

1. His taking a particular notice of them, and their carriage in the sinning time, Rev. iii. 4. "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy." They are his hidden ones, and the great piece of their heavy exercise is secret. But never a sigh or groan they utter but he knows it. However they be hid among a crowd, none of them are missed or overlooked.

2. His owning them for his own, Mal. iii. 17. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." And he owns them,

1st, As his own and his Father's servants, Rev. vii. 3, while others are observed by him to be serving their lusts, serving the times, and serving their own private worldly interest.

2dly, As his friends, those on his side in the war, while others are his enemies, having neither the word nor the sign.

3dly, As his treasure to be kept and preserved, while others are lost. Though they be the world's outcasts, they are his jewels, precious in his esteem, Mal. iii. 17.

And this owning signified by the marking, has respect to,

(1.) The time present wherein abominations abound, and God exerciseth patience, and they are left to sigh and groan, and are apt to think they are forgotten.

(2.) The suffering time coming; then he will own them, Mal. iii. 18. "Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not." When the Lord's anger is going out in a flame, yet then he will look on them with a pleased countenance as his own.

(3.) The time betwixt and the suffering time. For the mark once set on, is never lost. Though they have a heavy time to go through, he will own them as his.

3. His securing them, come what will. They shall be safe, as God's own people marked for safety.

Concerning this we may observe in general, that safety from trouble is sometimes the lot of God's mourners. Noah sighed in a sinning time, and God made him safe in a suffering time. There was an ark provided for him and his family, when the deluge came, and swept away the whole race of men. God can provide a hiding place to his people when the world is involved in the utmost chaos

of confusion and disorder. If we look to the providence of God, there will be found no random shots in the world. In a shower of bullets, there is none that can hit but where providence has marked its destination, Psal. xci. 7. "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand: but it shall not come nigh thee."

Frequently there is a mitigation of their trouble, when it befalls them. Though they drink of the cup it shall be of the brim, not of the bottom or dreggy part. The rod shall be to them the rod of a man, a weak man, that lays on but a slender stroke.

And they shall be safe from the sting of trouble. They will have ease within, though trouble without, Hab. iii. 16. When others are tossed with fears without, and terror within, and the guilty conscience is sounding an alarm within their sinful breasts, they shall have a feast in the sense of the Lord's goodness, at least in dependence on the promise. More particularly, this securing has a view,

1st, To public calamities in time. He will either (1.) Take them out of harm's way, before it come, as he did good king Josiah. Or, (2.) He will preserve them when it comes, as he did Lot from the destruction that overwhelmed Sodom and Gomorrah, and Jeremiah from being carried away captive to Babylon. Or (3.) Whatever their share in the public troubles be, they shall be happy in the divine favour, under the covert of the covenant of grace, which is a covenant of peace to all who have taken hold of it. Thus it fared with Jeremiah, chap. xv. 11. "The Lord said, Verily it shall be well with thy remnant, verily I will cause the enemy to intreat thee well in the time of evil, and in the time of affliction." Josiah got a promise of dying in peace, 2 Kings xxii. 20. but he died in battle; yet the promise stood firm; for they die in peace, die as they will, who die in a state of reconciliation with God in Christ. They make a blessed exchange that get to heaven for their hiding-place, go the times as they will.

2dly, To the great day when wrath shall come to be poured out on the wicked world in full measure, Mal. iii. 17. "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." Not one drop of that wrath shall fall upon them; but they shall enter upon the possession of all that blessedness and felicity which their Redeemer purchased for them at the price of his blood. Then will the joyful invitation be given them, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," Matth. xxv. 34.

II. The reasons of Christ's marking his sighing and groaning people, are shortly these.

1. Because they are his redeemed ones, being redeemed to God by his blood ; and his Spirit in them shews the blood sprinkled on them ; so that no destruction can befall them.

2. Because he loves them, having loved them with an everlasting love, and drawn them to him with the bands of love and the cords of a man ; and he will love them to the end. He sympathizes with them in all their troubles, and will see to their comfort and safety.

3. His own honour is engaged for their preservation and safety, that the world may see they serve a good Master, and that it is not in vain to row against the stream of a backsliding generation.

An inference or two shall conclude all.

1. Hence see that none shall be losers at Christ's hands, however heavy hearts they get for his sake. The tables will be turned, Is. lxy. 13, 14. " Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry : behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty : behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed : behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit."

2. Here we may see that upright walking is sure walking in the worst of times. It is better to sigh and groan with the remnant, than rejoice with the multitude, in the time of the apostasy of a generation : " for it shall be well with the righteous, but ill with the wicked. They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy."