

and nation's day: we have had a long day, but now we may say, Jer. vi. 4, "Woe unto us, for the day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out." We are threatened with a dreadful eclipse of gospel-light, and a dark night, and we may well conclude as to many of us, that our eyes will never see the breaking of the day again.

As the practical improvement of this subject, I shall only call on you to ponder seriously in your mind, the important inquiries addressed to you;—to pose your consciences closely with them as in the sight of God,—to profit by the instructive lessons afforded from them;—and, in short, that you study a being diligent in business, fervent in spirit, always serving the Lord.

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CHRIST'S PRESENCE WITH GOSPEL MINISTERS.\*

SERMON XVII.

MATTH. xxviii. 20,

*And lo, I am with you alway.*

OUR Lord Jesus Christ having, before his death, as a prophet, revealed his Father's mind, and taught the doctrine of salvation, confirmed the same by many miracles; and having in his death, as a priest, offered up himself a sacrifice to atone for the sins of his people, and so brought in an everlasting righteousness; appears here after his resurrection, as a King, ordering the affairs of his own kingdom, which is his church. And, *1st*, He asserts his power, his supremacy, and headship, ver. 18, given unto him as Mediator. *2dly*, He gives a commission to his apostles, and in them to their successors in the work of the ministry, to raise up unto him a kingdom out of the kingdoms of the earth, to proclaim his laws among them, and to enjoin obedience to these laws in his name, and to take men solemnly engaged thereto, vers. 19 and 20. Then, in the words of the text, by promise, he secures their encouragement, for the due discharge of their duty, in the words under consideration: "And lo, I am with you alway."—In these words consider,

1. The parties to whom this encouragement does belong: You, that is, (1.) The apostles, to whom these words were immediately directed: (2.) Ordinary ministers, succeeding to them in the ordinary work of the ministry, teaching and baptising, as is clear from

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the words, in which Christ promiseth to be with them to the end of the world; whereas the formal office of the apostleship was extraordinary, and soon expired. Their mission was immediate; their inspection universal and unconfined; they had an infallible directive power; John xvi. 13, "When he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth." They had the gift of miracles and tongues, and were eye-witnesses of Christ: 1 Cor. ix. 1, "Am I not an apostle? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" So that to allow any to be their successors in the formal office of the apostleship, as some Prelatists would have the bishops, is to contradict the plain testimony of the scriptures, and of our senses: but the authoritative dispensation of the word, and administration of the sacraments, with the appendant power of discipline and government, which were the substance of the apostolic office, are continued, and will be in the pastoral office to the end of the world; and to these is Christ's presence promised, not excluding such as receive and embrace Christ's word preached by them.—Consider,

2. How, and in what case, they may lay claim to this promised presence; that is in the faithful adherence to, and discharge of their work, put by their Master into their hands. This is the import of the particle, and which knits the work and the encouragement together, ver. 19, "Go ye," &c. If they shall quit their Master's work, they forfeit his promised presence. If they turn servants of men, they must look to them, and not to Christ, for their protection and assistance. If they receive their instructions from any other than our royal Master, they must bid farewell to their part in the lot of his servants. Men that take upon them to teach what Christ never commanded, bringing in error in doctrine, superstition, and the inventions of men in the worship of God, such have need of temporal power and force with them, seeing they have no ground from the word to expect Christ will be with them.—Consider,

3. The encouragement promised: "I am with you," &c. It is Christ's presence that is with them in their work, and who would refuse to go a journey where Christ himself will be companion in travel? if the work be hard his presence is sweet. Christ lays in here a sufficiency for the support of his servants against all the discouragements they may meet with in his work. And there are four things to be noticed in this.

(1.) There is but one encouragement proposed, their difficulties were many. If they looked to their work, it was very hard; they were sent out to grapple with the powers of darkness, to overturn the devil's kingdom, to reform the world sunk in idolatry and monstrous profanity, and to rescue the prey out of the mouth of the

roaring lion. If they looked within themselves, they might see a mass of emptiness, weakness, wants, nothingness, unable of themselves to resist the least temptation. If they looked abroad into the world, they might see that the venturing out into it, on such a design, was a running themselves into a manifest hazard; the wits of the world would treat them as a company of fools, the powers of the world as a company of seditious and pestilent fellows; the multitude of the world would cry, "Away with them, it is not meet that they should live on the earth." But go they must; and here is one answer to all their objections, "I am with you;" that is sufficient, be against you who will, "I am with you," to assist, protect, and bear you through in the work, and to make the word in your mouths do execution; I design to raise up, by your means, a kingdom to myself, maugre all the opposition of men and devils. He does not promise to send armies with them, but to go with them himself—His presence,

(2.) Is proposed as a present thing, an encouragement in hand: "I am with you—to the end;" not I "will be." The expression is emphatical.

[1.] According to the prophetic style, it denotes the utmost certainty his servants shall have his presence in his work to the end of the world, as surely as if it were already done.

[2.] It denotes Christ's presence with his apostles, to be, by his own allowance and appointment, a pledge of his presence with these that, being called, follow out the work that they began in their day: "I am with you;" and let these that follow take it as a certain pledge, "I will be with them too." Let the church be ever so low, there was never any glorious appearance Christ made for her, but she may call it Joseph, for the Lord shall add another.

[3.] It denotes, that Christ's servants, though they should be full of eyes behind and before, yet their eyes are often dim, that they even miss Christ when he is really with them, and so are dejected, because they see not their own mercy: "I am with you," &c.—His presence,

(3.) Is promised to be with them without interruption,—"always," all days, every day; it is an Old Testament phrase, denoting the continuance of a thing without interruption; as Gen. vi. 5, "And that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." He will not leave his servants at his work at any time; they may sometimes want the sense of his presence, but he is with them always, every day, in lightsome days, also in dark and gloomy days, whatever be their case, however hard their lot may be, their peace may be interrupted, but not their Master's presence with them. While they keep at his work, he will be upon their head.—His presence,

(4.) Is promised to be with them without end, till the end of the world; not that he will forsake them then; no, he will then give his faithful servants a place in the upper house, among them that are pillars in the temple of their God: they will enter into the joy of their Lord. But the work of their ministry, as it will continue to the world's end, so then it will be honourably laid by, and Christ will deliver up the kingdom to the Father; so that as long as the work lasts, the encouragement will go along with it.

4. There is in the words the note of attention prefixed, "Lo!" Hereby Christ stirs up and directs his servants to eye his promised presence as their encouragement: Say not ye are left alone; see, I am with you; look not to earth, or to an arm of flesh, for your support, but look upwards to heaven; let not unbelief shut your eyes, but while you have one eye on your work, fix another on your Master, and then you will go on cheerfully. Now, you see that Jesus Christ, the alone King and head of his church, as he has appointed a ministry in his church, and carved out their work for them, and peremptorily appointed them to set about it, so that he has promised them his presence always to the end of the world, in the faithful discharge of the work he has put into their hands; and whatever be the opposition and discouragement they may meet with in it, he wills them to eye his promised presence as sufficient to bear them through in the work, against all discouragements whatsoever. This is the purport of the words of the text, which being thus explained, I shall now apply it.

I. Has Jesus Christ promised his presence to his servants in their work? Let us, then, my fathers and brethren, cleave to our great work, to which we are called of the Lord. Let us steadfastly pursue the ends of our ministry, the advancing of the kingdom of Christ, and the pulling down the kingdom of Satan, according to the commission we have from our Lord and Master. Let us follow our work faithfully, over the belly of all discouragement and opposition which we may meet with in it. Our day is a dark day, and like to be darker; the Lord is angry with the generation, the plague is begun, and it is to be feared there will be a miserable face on the church and land ere it end. A door, we see, is opened, whereby errors in doctrine may crowd in, and set up their heads without control, and superstitious worship and ceremonies, mere inventions of men's own hearts, may be, and are introduced, to mar the beauty of this church in the simplicity of gospel worship, to the dishonour of God, to whom alone it belongs to appoint what way he will be worshipped: and the discipline and government of his house are left to be trampled under foot of profane men, for any assistance we can expect now, but from Him whose institutions they are; which surely

calls us to lift up our eyes unto the heavens, from whence our help is promised. Our times are like to be ensnaring and very trying times to all sorts. The Lord's hand is very heavy by a great sickness and mortality; but the face of the generation looks as if the time were coming, when men shall think those happy who get to their grave in peace. If it should be so, we need not wonder at it. —Allow me to say in favour of the holy providence of God,

1. Providence (if it be so) has not stolen a march upon us; we have had fair warning, both from the word, and particular dispensations, whereby we have been brought, as it were, to the brow of the hill, and the Lord has brought us back, as with that, Hos. xi. 8, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel?" Yet have we not returned to the Lord; we have had the Lord's talents among our hands in peace now these two and twenty years; can it be but God will put both ministers and people to the trial, what they have made of the many preachings, communions, and other means of grace they have enjoyed. I think the light has shone very bright in our day; I dare not say our sacred heat has been proportionable; but ordinarily the saddest strokes follow hard at the heels of the clearest dispensations.

2. Many there are, who have the root of the matter in them, who need to have it awakened with a storm; many sleeping Jonahs in our ship, that are yet sighing and going backward, much filthiness and blood gathered on the daughters of Zion, to be purged with the spirit of judgment and burning.

3. There are many who have taken up the name, but have nothing of the reality of religion, having gathered like summer's vermin in the time of the church's peace; it is but reasonable to expect a storm for the discovery of such, by the loss of whom the church may turn to less bulk, but not be less worth.

4. The case of the generation cries for a stroke, in regard of the horrid contempt of Christ and his gospel at this day. The preaching of the gospel has for several years been a weary work, and very fruitless; and the truth is, we have, as it were, been weary of God. Atheism and horrid profanity abound, and are on the growing hand; these cry for vengeance; enemies have a cup to fill up, they have filled it well formerly, it is like, they have more to do to prepare them for an overthrow. So we have reason to lay our accounts with hardships in our work, and that we may have the walls to build in troublous times; and readily judgment begins at the house of God, and where it will. But let us faithfully follow our Master's interests, and work, and not faint.

And that we may be stirred up hereunto, let us consider,

1. Our Lord Christ will be with us in the faithful discharge of his work, Go ye, "and lo, I am with you." A believing sight of this would steel your foreheads in the Lord's work, with courage and holy resolution, Ezek. iii. 9, "As an adamant harder than flint, have I made thy forehead." Will Christ be with us in the discharge of his work? Then,

(1.) We shall have furniture for our work: Isa. xli. 10, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." 2 Cor. iii. 5, 6, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament." No man goeth a warfare on his own charges, neither shall our Lord send his soldiers to fight his battles without furniture, more especially when he is upon their head himself; and if our work be more than ordinary, he will make the furniture proportionable: Acts iv. 13, "Now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled, and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." May be, we have much ado to get a sermon, when we have all time for study and meditation; what shall come of us then, if we be hurried? Truly, if we have the call, we may look for it being given us in that hour: Matth. x. 19, "For it shall be given you in that same hour, what ye shall speak," with more heavenly oratory in it than at other times. Be it doing-work or suffering-work, he allows furniture, Phil. i. 29, "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." Isa. xl. 30, 31, "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that hath no might, he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not weary, they shall walk and not faint."

(2.) We shall have success in our work, that is, the word in our mouth shall accomplish that which Christ pleaseth, Isa. lv. 2, "So shall my word be that goeth out of my mouth, it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it." As to the elect of God, "As many as are ordained to eternal life, believe, however the stream of a graceless generation may go." As to believers, they shall be edified and bettered by it, Mic. ii. 7, "Do not thy words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" and very ordinarily the gospel is like a fire, that spreads most in a windy day. Nay,

the Lord being with us, it will not be absolutely without effect on those that are not one whit bettered by it. It will be at least for a testimony to be produced against them, for our Lord, at the last day. If ye go where they are, the dust of your feet shall witness against them. Salvation was in their offer; it will manifest their unsoundness. The gospel will hang the sign of folly at every wicked man's door, let them entertain it as they will: Mal. iii. 2, "But who will abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap." It will torment them that dwell on the earth. Christ's sword is two-edged, if it do not execution on men's lusts, it will do execution on their souls: Hos. vi. 5, "Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of my mouth." The word will never leave them as it finds them, but will either make them better or worse.

(3.) We shall have protection in our work: Rev. ii. 1, "Saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." If earth and hell should conspire against us, as long as our Lord has any service for us in the world, we shall be protected. Every one has their day of working, let them trust the Lord as long as that lasts, let them go on in their work, they shall be protected. But when the night comes, appointed by the Lord, wherein he has no more service for us, then, and not till then, shall we be called off; and that night will carry us off whether we be idle or at work.

(4.) We shall have provision: Heb. xiii. 5, 6, "Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." Let us be at our work, and God will see to our provision: Psalm xxxvii. 3, "Trust in the Lord, and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." Bread has been an old temptation to ministers: Amos vii. 12, 13, "Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread. But prophecy not again any more at Bethel, for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court." But such as were faithful to the Lord have always hazarded the bread, rather than a good conscience: consult ver. 14, to the end of the chapter. Nature is content with little, grace with less; if we cannot trust Christ for our bread, I think we will scarcely be able to trust him with our souls. Miserable is that bread which cannot be got down without straining our conscience; but little bread will go far with a good conscience and God's bless-

ing: let us mind that, Dan. i. 15, "And their countenance did appear fairer and fairer in flesh, than the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat."

(5.) Then, as Elisha said to his servant, 2 Kings ii. 16, "Fear not, for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them." Psalm xciii. 3, 4, "The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice, as the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea." The faith of the Lord's presence in our work would make all opposition of our enemies very contemptible; seeing he is with us that hath the devil in chains, and who sets restraining bounds to the sea, and to the wrath of man, and can in a moment overthrow all the enemies of his work.

(6.) Then he will be against them that are against us in our work. "I am with you." If the world will make themselves parties against you in your work, then, "Lo, I am with you," on your side against them. A faithful ministry has always been the great eyesore of the world; and none can at any time engage in that work, but must lay his account with opposition. But sooner or later it returns on the heads of their enemies, according to that prophetic prayer, which is an awful hedge about Christ's ministers: Deut. xxxiii. 11, "Smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again."

2. Further to engage us to cleave to the Lord's work, let us consider, God will be with his ministers and his church always, even to the end of the world.—Then,

(1.) Lose what we will in the faithful discharge of our work, we will never lose our God: "Lo I am with you *always*." There is nothing we have in the world, but enemies may get their hands upon; but there is one thing which they cannot reach, which is better than all goods, liberty, life; that is, they cannot separate us from the love of our Lord Jesus: Rom. viii. 38, 39, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." There can be no lot so hard, but Christ's presence can sweeten, and make it desirable.

(2.) The world will have an end, and all its smiles and frowns also will be at length laid by for ever. Why then should its smiles flatter, or its frowns fright us from our Lord's work and interest? A little time will carry off both the slothful and faithful servant. But happy that servant, whom, when his Lord and Master cometh, shall find so doing. The solid faith of that life and immortality

brought to light by the gospel, which we preach, would, I believe, make us very peremptory in our resolutions of diligence and faithfulness in our work, over the belly of all opposition in the world.

(3.) Our Lord's work will never lie for want of hands; he will have a church and a ministry to the end of the world. If we lay it by, others will take it up, and write death on our faces, by yoking us to it even in the heat of the day.

(4.) Our Lord and his people shall stand the last upon the earth, his enemies will drop off after one another, he will outlive them all, and stand a conqueror, when they are all routed, and made to quit the field, "Lo, I am with you to the end." His cause will always be victorious at length, and bear down all before it. Who knows but the wheels of providence may be in motion towards the total overthrow of Prelacy, and ceremonies in Britain and Ireland? Providence has often gone to work in as unlikely a way.

III. Has Christ promised to be with us in his own work? O! then, let us not divide among ourselves, let us endeavour unity in the Lord with all our might, and cleave to the work of God in this land, as one man, against Popery, Prelacy, superstition, error, and profanity, and whatsoever is contrary to sound godliness, seeing it is the work laid on us by our Lord in his sacred word, the book of our instructions, and seeing the land has been engaged thereto by solemn covenants with God. If anything ruin this work of the Lord amongst us, it will be our divisions. No doubt there will be means used by our enemies to divide us, knowing well, that if we once break, we are in danger of being broken more and more. Therefore let us pray and act for unity in the Lord; though, like the builders of the wall of Jerusalem, we be separated upon the wall, yet being upon the wall, all at our work, the work will go on. But that which will be our ruin, will be one party throwing down what the other builds up; which will be the case, if in the anger of the Lord we be divided. If the mountain of the ministry fall a burning with the fire of division, all will quickly fall into the sea; but our unity will be our strength: and yet as contemptible as the ministry of this church is at this day in the eyes of many, their unity will make them beautiful as Tizrah, and terrible as an army with banners; yea, even in our evil time, would afford us a glimmering prospect that the Lord would yet fill his house with his glory, Isa. lii. 8, "Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice, with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion;" Matth. xviii. 19, "Again, I say unto you that if two of you shall agree upon earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which

is in heaven." "Agree," or, or as the word is, sympathize, sound together. I take both these to be an allusion to that sweet passage, 2 Chron. v. 13, "It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals, and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever; that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God." If, then, we have any love to the Lord, to his interests, to his people, to our own souls, let us be one in the Lord's work. Cursed will that carnal interest be, that shall loose a pin in the tabernacle of Zion.

III. Has Christ promised to be with us in his work? Then let us not forget him who is with us, let us love Christ, let us preach Christ; this is our great work at all times, Eph. iii. 8, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Let us beware of legal preaching; let that be the scope of our preaching, which is the great design of the gospel, to discover the corruption of men's nature, and to exalt the riches, power and freedom of grace in Christ Jesus. We have the more need to take heed to this, because the corrupting of the doctrine of the gospel is like to be the temptation of our day.

To conclude: As to you, the people, whether ye be in the Lord's interests or not, ye have heard what ye may apply to yourselves. I think, upon the whole, if ye be wise, ye will say with these, Zech. viii. "We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." The profane world will be ready to laugh at this, but both ministers and people must lay their account to be fools in the world's eyes, if they will be wise in the sight of God.

Let none think from what I have said, that I have proposed myself as an example, or that I have forgot myself in this matter. God knows, I look on myself as the weakest and most unfit, for a time of trial, of all the servants of my Lord. But let truth stand and take place, come of the speaker what will. I desire, with you, to fix mine eyes on the promise of His presence, who hath said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."