

at the table of our Lord; it is an ordinance only for those who are quickened, and made spiritually alive; it is the children's bread, and therefore they only, who are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, have a right to it. Endeavour to be in a right frame; to have grace in exercise; a holy hunger, faith, repentance, and love. It is not enough that you have oil in your lamps, you must also have your lamps trimmed, and the oil burning. Your graces must be in exercise. If this be your state, and this be your frame, then surely it will be good for you to draw near to God at his own table: "They that thus wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up on wings like eagles, run and not be weary, walk and not faint."

THE PERFECTION OF PROVIDENTIAL DISPENSATIONS.*

SERMON VI.

PSALM xviii. 30,

As for God, his work is perfect.

THE Psalmist by this time had followed the Lord through many a deep step, and he had endured various troubles. Here, in the text, he looks back on these ways in which the Lord had led him, and gives his verdict as to them: "As for God," &c. In the words there is,

1. A magnificent preface: "As for God." He stands up here in his defence against an ungodly world, to justify his proceedings: "As for God," I that have tried his way can speak to his commendation.

2. What of God he commends: His way. There is a twofold way. (1.) That wherein men walk to and with God.—Personal; Christ, who is the way to the Father:—Real; holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. None of these are here meant. (2.) The way wherein God walks with men, the way of his providences, his dispensations, the way he takes with men in disposing of them.

3. The commendation is perfect; there is no flaw in that way. Be his dispensations never so hard, there can be no fault really observed in them by the most discerning eye; they are faultless. These words afford us this

Doct. That the dispensations of providence are altogether perfect and faultless, however they appear to our carnal hearts.

In illustration I shall,

I. Take notice of some, among many, seeming faults our corruptions would spy out in the dispensations of providence.

II. Inquire in what respects the way of God is perfect.

III. Confirm the point.

IV. Make some practical improvement.

I. I am to take notice of some, among many, seeming faults our corruptions would spy out in the dispensations of providence.

1. The reason of dispensations not seen. The design of Providence lies oftentimes hid, and it is no easy matter to discover it: "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known," Psalm lxxvii. 19. The Lord leads the man and he knows not where; therefore corruption is ready to storm at this, and disdains to follow the Lord, unless he will tell him what way he is going; but the fault is in the eye, not in the way. Time is big with the discovery, but must go a while before it is brought forth: Acts x. 17, "Now, while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate." John xiii. 6, 7, "Then cometh Jesus to Simon Peter; and Peter said unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." When the spectacles of faith are on, no fault appears.

2. Providence seeming to forget the promises, and the word seeming to miscarry. Then we are ready to say, as in Jer. xv. 18, "Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" Abraham thought he saw this fault, and he would take a way of his own to rectify it. But though the promise tarried, yet it was accomplished, for Isaac, and not Ishmael, was to be his heir. Fools' haste is no speed.

3. Providence going cross to the promises, his works to his word, pulling down with the one hand what he seemed to be building up with the other. Thus it appeared, when Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac, Gen. xxii. So also it was when God threatened to cut short the days of Hezekiah, Isa. xxxviii. 1. But there is no fault here yet; wait the end, as in these instances; they are but raw travellers, who think that the way lies always even forward; the way in the wilderness is often crooked.

4. Providence running, as it seems, quite contrary to the design

of it. Many times the Lord has a design on foot for the good of his church and people; but a continued tract of disappointments cross it more and more, till the very grave-stone seems to be laid upon it. Thus it was with Joseph, when he was put into the dungeon. But what fault is there here, more than when the sun sets to make it darker and darker, till day-break. Stay till the dawning of the design. Oftentimes providence reads best backwards: "For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left," Deut. xxxii. 36.

5. Providence laying aside the most likely means. But where is the fault here? for if he lay aside these means; he will accomplish his designs by other means, and what though they be unlikely? This stumbled the world, 1 Cor. i. 23, 24, "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." Naaman in distress stumbled at the unlikeliness of the means prescribed by the prophet for the cure of his leprosy, 2 Kings v. 11. The disciples of Jesus also stumbled, and judged the death of Christ a very unlikely mean of leading him and them to glory; and they had the same opinion of his ascension, John xvi. 6, 7. Men have their own ways: they will needs think that they know best what is good for them. But God knows that his people are not good choosers of their own lot, and sovereignty will have a latitude.

6. Providence falling on means quite contrary to the design of it. But what the worse was the blind man that he was cured with clay put upon his eyes? The Lord works healing by wounding, and comfort by tears. The earthquake, the troubling of the waters, the dungeon of Joseph, the den of Daniel, the whale of Jonah, yea, we know, that "all things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose," Rom. viii. 28.

7. Wicked godless men getting the sunny side of the brae, walking contrary to God, and yet providence smiles, that never an ill turn almost misgives in their hand. This made Asaph stammer, Psalm lxxiii. 12—14, "Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world, they increase in riches. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning." It shook Jeremiah, chap. xii. 1. 2. But there is no fault in this, that the sun of prosperity rises on the wicked: "For when the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they may be destroyed for ever," Psalm xcii. 7. The sun rose fair

on Sodom that very day on which it was destroyed; all Israel followed Absalom; Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord; Haman finds all things going to his wish. But see the end of all these things.

8. Astonishing strokes lighting on those that are most dear to God. Eccl. viii. 14, "There is a vanity which is done upon the earth, that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked." Eli's sons are slain, his daughter-in-law dies, and himself breaks his neck. The two sons of Aaron die at the altar. How numerous were the afflictions that came upon Job. But where is the fault here? Christ's cross, to a child of God, is better than the world's crown, 2 Cor. xii. 9. 10.

9. Great afflictions meeting the Lord's people in the way of duty. This was Jacob's case in many instances. He was in the way God bade him go, yet he met with many trials and afflictions. It hath been so also with many of the Lord's people in all ages. But the Lord has his holy ends in these things; he shews them that they are sinful creatures; though they are in his way, tries their faith and patience, and makes way for higher experiences.—I am,

II. To shew in what respects the way of God is perfect.

1. All the dispensations of providence are exactly according to the pattern shown in the word. If you would know wherein a man has exactly built a house, look to the draught given him. Meet with what we will, all may be reduced to, and explained by, scripture doctrines, prophecies, promises, threatenings, or examples.

2. They are exactly suited to the necessities of his people, and to the designs of them. God weighs every grain of sand which he puts in our glasses; he will never put in too little, nor too much; nothing wanting, nothing superfluous. Deut. xxxii. 4, "He is the Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he."

3. In respect of the times of them. Nothing too soon done, nor too late; all fall out in their proper season, determined in the unchangeable council of God.

4. In respect of its stability. Our ways are unstable, and that is a great fault; but God's ways are not so. That which is crooked cannot be made straight. There will always be a crook in our lot. That is sure, and we could not walk even without it.—I shall,

III. Confirm the point. Consider,

1. That the saints in their experience see this. They readily and fully acknowledge it, Hos. xiv. 9, "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them, but the

transgressors shall fall therein." This is their unanimous vote when in a right mood, and will be so in heaven, when the web is out. Then will they say, "He hath done all things well."

2. That they are all the product of infinite holiness, which can do nothing wrong.

3. That they are all directed, as well as contrived, by infinite wisdom, which knows best how to frame matters.—It remains that,

IV. I make some practical improvement, in

1. A use of information. Are the dispensations of providence all right? Then, (1.) If any thing be wrong with us, we may see where the fault lies, not in God, but in ourselves, Job x. The oar he rolls his vessel with is in the waters of affliction, and therefore we think the oar is crooked; but that is our misjudging of God. (2.) That we should justify God in the harshest dispensations, give him the glory, even when we walk on the mountains of darkness. Providence will abide a look of the most piercing impartial eye. But when the eye is infected, it will take up things in their wrong colours.

2. Of comfort to the people of God, whatever providences they meet. Be they never so dark, be they never so little understood by them, yet they are all right and faultless. God does not distribute favours to them by guess, but by measure and weight.

3. Of reproof to those who censure, murmur, and quarrel with the dispensations of providence. This is, (1.) to accuse God of folly, as if he were not wise enough to govern the world that he has made. O how often fall we into this, as if we could have ordered better than providence has done. Murmuring will step up, and correct the escapes of infinite wisdom. (2.) Of injustice, as if he were too hard upon his creatures, that deserve better at his hand. For why would people murmur at their right and due? (3.) Of impotency, as if he could not take away our crosses as easily as he brings them on, or could not make them work for our good.

Lastly, Of exhortation. Let all of us, especially the Lord's people, be exhorted to submit and stoop to sovereignty, be our lot in the world what it will. There is none want their own crosses. Every one has some burden or another to bear; and if we would in truth come after Christ, we are enjoined "to take up our cross, and follow him."