

works, as an impiety towards God, and unrighteousness towards men. (3.) Beware of a dead case and frame, that is, to be cold, stiff, motionless, of the colour of clay, as men that are in a withered, lifeless, spiritual condition.

*Lastly*, Let heaven and eternal life be the main thing ye have in view, and are in quest of, saying, There is my rest, and there must I be.

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THE SUITABLE IMPROVEMENT OF SAINTS' FORMER EXPERIENCES.\*

SERMON XI.

2 KINGS ii. 14,

*And he took the mantle of Elijah, that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah?*

AMONG all the elders who have through faith obtained a good report, there is none more remarkable than Elijah the Tishbite. He was a person altogether extraordinary. In his exercise and experience he was singularly distinguished. His translation was a striking loss to the church of God; it was, however, not irreparable; his exercises were, in some measure, patterns to the people of God in after ages; his experiences were powerful encouragements to a following of him who through faith and patience inherited the promises; and, what was of still greater importance, Elijah's God still lived, and, as being the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, was to be the object of hope and confidence to his people in all generations. In all their straits he was to be looked to, and inquired after, for his presence with them, and his blessing upon them. Thus, we see, was Elisha exercised in the verse before us; for when overwhelmed, and in perplexity, "He took the mantle of Elijah, which fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

This verse shows us,

1. What Elisha did. (1.) He took Elijah's mantle, that fell from him; God so ordered, that it fell in Elisha's sight for his comfort, that he might have it as a token of the spirit of Elijah resting on him. He willingly takes it up: he did not say, What avails the mantle now, when it is not above Elijah's shoulders? No; that

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God that did wonders by it before, can do the same again, on whose shoulders soever, by divine appointment; even so the ordinances of God are to be prized for the Lord's sake, not slighted for the sake of the instruments, though they are not like to fill the room of those that went before them. (2.) He smote the waters with it. He was to go back to the schools of the prophets in Jericho. Though the Lord take away eminent instruments, his work must not be neglected, they that are left behind must bestir themselves to carry on the Lord's work. Jordan was between him and them, as oftentimes depths of difficulties will be found in the way of duty. He might have boated it over; that was the easiest way, and to the carnal eye the safest. But it was not the way his godly predecessor took before him; therefore, having the same spirit as he had, he will rather believingly venture on the waters, in the faith that God would carry him through, as he did Elijah before him. So he "smote the waters."

2. We have what he said when he smote the waters: "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" It is a vehement exclamation for the presence of that God that was with Elijah: "Where is," &c.; or a most ardent prayer for it: where art thou? as some read it; for neither "is" nor "art" is in the original. He inquires no more after Elijah, he has no petitions to that saint when once he was departed; that had been impious; what he had to ask of him, he asked while he was on earth. He does not sit down and weep, and pore on the loss of Elijah, as if there had been no more hopes of good days since he was gone; but he betakes himself to Elijah's God. Though Elijah was gone, his God still remained. Elijah's experience of good from Elijah's God, kindled in Elisha's heart a surprising desire after him, and fills him with hope of good entertainment at the door where Elijah had come so good speed; for these are not words of diffidence, but of mighty earnestness, and strong faith; as appears by considering,

3. The issue of the whole, which was according to his wish. God was present with him the same way he had been with Elijah before, Jordan is divided, &c. These words, (he also) some make Elisha's answering to himself, and read them, even he, viz. Elijah's God, yet endures; but though there is no doubt Elisha believed this, yet that reading does violence to the points and stops, without regarding of which there can be no certain sense of any language: therefore our translation is preferable; and these words (he also) are emphatical to shew the freedom of God's grace, which is tied to none, but open and free to all that come to him for it in the way that others received it.—From these words, I take this

DOCTRINE, That the consideration of God's presence with his people in former days, should bring the succeeding generation to the same God for the same entertainment.

In speaking to which, I shall,

I. Instance a few of these experiences of God's people in former days.

II. Shew how we should come to God for the same entertainment.

III. Give the reasons of the doctrine.—And,

IV. Add the improvement.

I. I shall instance a few of the sweet and desirable experiences of the Lord's people, which should bring us to the gracious Giver for the same, and such like; and I shall instance none but these of Elijah, who, you must remember, was a man subject to like passions as we are, James v. 17, and to these I think the text leads me. Some instances of sweet entertainment this holy man had; such as,

1. The God of Elijah gave him the sweet experience of keeping warm and lively in a very cold and dead generation; so that he was best when others were worst. His zeal for God burnt most vigorously when the generation was turned most coldrife, halting betwixt God and Baal, like true fire that burns most keenly in the winter frost, when a chill and cold air was the only air about him. By the warm blowings of the Spirit from above upon him, he was kept warm within. When nothing but deadness was on every hand, the Spirit of life from above kept him lively. So it was with Noah in the old world: Gen. vi. 9, "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation." And Lot, 2 Pet. ii. 8, "For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds."

But where is the Lord God of Elijah in these dregs of time, wherein professors generally are carried away with the stream of impiety from all their liveliness and tenderness that sometimes have been among them, when the more wickedness sets up its head, piety is made to hide its head the more? a sad evidence that God is gone from us, when the standard of wickedness makes such advances, and that of shining holiness is retreating, and can hardly get hands to hold it up. I will tell you two sad experiences, common at this day.

(1.) The fulfilling of that scripture, Matth. xxiv. 12, "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." It is a time when atheism, deism, and immorality, make prodigious advances, and practical godliness is under a deep decay. I doubt if ever Satan had more hands at work to overthrow revealed religion,

and to raze the foundations of it, than at this day; and this effort of Satan's against the church, has joined with it a most lamentable decay of the vitals of practical religion in those that are called by the Lord's name; so that we are like to be exposed to this furious attack, wanting the best piece of our armour against it; that is, an experience and feeling of the power of truth on our own souls: ah! "where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

(2.) What heat there is, strikes all outward, while in the meantime folks are key-cold within; a sad sign of a distempered body. It is not hard to discern severals shewing a great deal of concern in the lamentable occurrences of our day; but how hard is it to find a man that is truly awakened to the exercise of godliness by all the alarming dispensations of our day, that is moved with fear, and busy preparing an ark for the evil day, labouring to get the particular controversy between God and his soul removed, putting out of his way the stumbling-block of his iniquity, and setting matters in order for the day of the Lord? Nay, sirs, though some talk in their sleep, it seems we will all sleep together, till God's heavy hand give us a fearful awakening: "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

2. The God of Elijah gave him the sweet experience of the power of prayer: James v. 17, "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months; and he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." He was mighty in prayer; by his prayers the bottles of heaven were opened, the key of the clouds turned, nay, the bands of death loosed, 1 Kings xvii. He was a great favourite of Heaven, whose cries pierced the clouds, got in to the throne, and returned, like Noah's dove, with an olive-branch of peace in his mouth. Such experience of the power of prayer had Jacob; Hos. xii. 4, "Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed;" Gen. xxxii. Many times the Lord's people, when closed up on every side, have found a sweet outgate, their souls flying upward in prayer. The prayers of the saints have been the great ordinance of the church, have frustrated the plans of enemies, and turned them back on their own heads.

But where is the God of Elijah, while the trade with heaven by prayers is so very low? Alas for the dead, cold, and flat prayers, that come from the lips of professors at this day! so weak and languishing, that they cannot reach heaven. Sometimes the Lord lets loose enemies on his people, tosses them from vessel to vessel, and then the way betwixt heaven and them was well occupied. They had still some particular suits lying before the throne, and they

could have given a good account of their receipts. But long ease has made them lose their tongue; so that the experience of many in that point now can hardly be named, unless they turn back to former days. There is one experience of Elijah's, which, I fear, is not uncommon among praying folk at this day, and that is, a restraint laid on them, that they cannot wrestle with God for the averting of wrath from the generation of God's wrath, 1 Kings xvii. 3—9. Such a sad experience had Jeremiah also, before the Babylonish captivity, Jer. xiv. 11, and xv. 1. And though God doth not so reveal his mind now in particular cases, yet I suppose that it will be found, that those who live near God, and have the spirit of prayer in such cases, may find something equivalent thereto in their liberty and confidence with the Lord, and that according to the subject of their requests: Ezek. xxxvi. 37, "Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them."

3. The experience of the sweet fruits of dependance on the Lord, and of a little going far, with his blessing: 1 Kings xvii. 16, "And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord." Elijah saw so very few for God in his day, that he thought he was alone; and the Lord strengthened his faith by such experiences. Many times God's people have had such experiences of the Lord's bringing great things about by small beginnings, as the cloud like a man's hand, according to the promise, Prov. iv. 18, "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Hos. vi. 3, "His going forth is prepared as the morning, and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." God has many ways of working in the experience of his people; and when he works by means, sometimes he does great things by small means, as the feeding of Elijah, the widow and her son, so long on an handful of meal, and a little oil in a cruse; Haman's bellish plot is overturned by the king's falling from his rest one night, Esth. vi. 1. Sometimes by contrary means, as Elijah was fed by the ravens who were more likely to have picked flesh from him, than to have brought it to him.

But where is the God of Elijah at this day, when what we have seems to be blown upon, that it goes in effect to nothing? Our table is plentifully covered, yet our souls are starved; our goodness sometimes looks as a morning cloud, it blackens the face of the heavens, and promises a hearty shower, but quickly proves as a little cloud, like unto a man's hand, which is ready to go to nothing; yea, the generation is blinded by the means that have a natural tendency to give light. Ah! "Where is the God of Elijah?"

4. The experience of a gracious boldness to face the most daring wickedness of the generation he lived in, though it was one of the worst. This eminently appeared in his rencounter with Ahab, 1 Kings xviii. 1; his standing alone against four hundred and fifty of Baal's prophets; whatever was his natural temper, he owed this to the grace of God, for when he was left to his natural courage, it failed him, chap. xix. 2—4; but the Lord spirited him then for the hard work he had to do, that he feared nothing in his master's cause, Acts iv. 13, "When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, they marvelled, and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

But where is the God of Elijah now, while the iniquities of our day meet with such faint resistance, while a brow for the cause of God, a tongue to speak for him, and a heart to act, are so much wanting. The wicked of the world, though they have an ill cause in hand, yet they pursue it boldly; but, alas! the people of God shame their honest cause, by their cowardice and faint appearing in it. If God give us not another spirit, more fitted for such a day, we will betray our trust, and bring the curse of the succeeding generation on us.

5. The experience of a glorious and powerful manifestation of himself, in a solemn ordinance, even at the sacrifice on Mount Carmel, which was ushered in with the spirit of prayer in Elijah, 1 Kings xviii. 37—39, "Hear me, O God, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces, and they said, The Lord he is the God, The Lord he is the God." That was a glorious day's work, when Satan fell like lightning from heaven, from which day, no doubt, many dated their conversion, some their revival, and the people there generally felt somewhat divine on their spirits. Such glorious days the church has often had in ordinances, which have been as a high stream-tide of the gospel; so that three thousand were converted at one sermon, Acts ii. 41.

But where is the God of Elijah, when so little of the Spirit's influences is found in ordinances, even solemn ordinances? Here is the mantle, but where is the God of Elijah? Here are the grave-clothes in which sometimes the Lord was wrapt up, but where is he himself? Communion-days have sometimes been glorious days in Scotland, and sometimes the gospel hath done much good; so that ministers have had almost as much to do to heal broken hearts, as now to get hard hearts broken; but "where now is the God of Elijah?"

6. The experience of being enabled to go far upon a meal, 1 Kings xix. 8, but where now is such experiences, while there is so little strength in the meals to which we now sit down? This is a time wherein there is much need of such an experience; the Lord seems to be saying to his people, "Rise and eat, for the journey is long;" and what a hard journey some may have, ere they get another meal, who knows?

*Lastly*, 'The experience of the Lord's removing difficulties out of his way, when he himself could do nothing at them; Jordan divided; so Peter had the iron gate opened to him of its own accord: for when the Lord takes the work in hand, were it never so desperate as to us, it will succeed well with him. Sure we have need of his experience this day. How is the case of many souls so embarrassed at this day, that they cannot extricate themselves, by reason of long and continued departures from God! so that all they can do is, that they are fighting and going backward. Ah! "where is the God of Elijah," to dry up those devouring deeps! Enemies have surrounded the church, and brought her to the brow of the hill, ready to cast her over; "where is the God of Elijah," to make a way for her escape?—I shall next consider,

II. How we should come to God for the same entertainment, if we would come speed. There were two things Elisha did, for the presence of God to be with him, as he had been with Elijah.

1. He prayed for it, sent his prayer to heaven for it; and if we would have the experience of God's presence as in former days, we must ply the throne of grace for it this night. And there are three things in his prayer, which must be in ours.

(1.) A most pressing sense of need, where he saw he could not venture into Elijah's post without Elijah's God. Sense of need makes earnest prayers. What is the reason we see not the glory of the Lord as formerly? we reign as kings without it; men have found out ways of their own, to get comfort without communion with God; they have the creatures' breasts to suck at, when the Lord's consolations are not dropping into them. But if ever the Lord return to this generation, there will be a hunger raised in them, that all the world will not be able to satisfy.

(2.) A most vehement desire of his presence; "Where is the God of Elijah?" There was a flame of desire after the Lord, that could not be satisfied without him. Some have observed in nature, that the tongue is tied by a double string to the heart in man. If so, it seems it has been designed that the tongue should be a stringed instrument, to sound out only the language of the heart. Were the heart more eager for the divine communications, we would

wrestle with God in earnest, and not let him go till he bless us ; but, alas ! our coldrife prayers do but beg a denial.

(3.) There was great faith in his prayers : “ Where is the God of Elijah ? ” Faithless prayers will be inefficacious prayers to the end ; but the hand of faith will pierce through the cloud wherewith the Lord covereth himself. *1st*, He believed God could do what he sought, therefore he calls him Jehovah, and the God of Elijah, who had discovered his power in dividing the waters before. *2dly*, He believed God would do it, he had God’s call to the work ; Elijah was taken away from him, but he had Elijah’s mantle in his hand, for a token God would be with him, as with Elijah before ; and he was not faithless, but believing. So we must believe also, if we would see the glory of God ; not only the power, but the good-will of God ; Jer. xvii. 6, 7, “ Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.”

2. He used the means Elijah before him did, for attaining God’s appearance and manifestation of himself. He smote the waters ; no matter though the means be unlikely to produce the effect, if they be of God’s appointment ; and in faith we must stretch out the withered hand, if we would have it restored, and venture on the work upon the credit of the promise.

As a conclusion to this discourse, let me exhort you to go to the Lord Jesus this night, and wrestle for his presence as in former times ; and let the consideration of God’s presence with his people in former times, take you to the same God for the same entertainment.

To prevail with you, I would offer the following motives.

1. Consider it is too evident the Lord has forsaken this generation in great measure. He is writing bitter things against this church and land. Her beauty is marred upon all her assemblies ; where the cloud of glory some time rested, we may write *Ichabod* ! Hence it is so few are converted in our day ; and the Lord’s own children, though they get some food, yet they fare not so well as in former times. Why ? because the Lord is withdrawn in his anger. The sun of the gospel in Scotland is as a winter sun, and looks as if near the setting, at least getting under a dark cloud : Isa. lxiv. 7, “ There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold on thee, for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.”

2. This would be the way to get a blessing ; importunity prevails much in heaven. Were we thus exercised, we might get a blessing to this church, a blessing to this communion : Cant. iii. 4, “ I found him whom my soul loveth ; I held him, and would not let him go,

until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chambers of her that conceived me :” a blessing we should seek from him to ourselves. Though the Lord is sometimes so angry with a generation, that there is no turning away of his wrath, yet the serious seekers of his face will always get the blessing: Isa. iii. 10, “ Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.”

3. The door we set you to is a door where many have been liberally helped before you, and the Lord's arm is not shortened. The saints that were richest in experience got them all there, and all the fair ones now in glory, he was their God, that was with them in life, death, and now after death. Let the good report of his house, then, make you flock about his door, for there is no ground for that temptation, Job v. 1, “ Call now, if there be any that will answer thee, and to which of the saints wilt thou turn ?”

4. It is a door where there is nothing given for personal worth. All that ever was given there to any of the children of fallen Adam, was given with that protestation, Ezek. xxxvi. 32, “ Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you : be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel !” That the most unworthy in all succeeding generations might see they were welcome, it is for his own sake ; and that cannot change.

*Lastly,* What will ordinances avail without his presence ? Nay, they will do ill, instead of doing us good ; they will bring on us a curse instead of a blessing ; and therefore wrestle with him, and protest, Exod. xxxiii. 15, “ If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence.” The sermons will be to you as an empty sound, the Lord's table as an empty chair of state, when the King is away. If his presence be not given you, you will get no spiritual feast ; and one had better be at a common table, than at the Lord's table, when they do not feed : 1 Cor. xi. 29, “ For he that eateth unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.” If the king be away, then there will be no furniture for trials, none for the evil day, that seems to be approaching quickly ; none for a dying day that is awaiting all of us. Now, if ye would find him, seek him in Christ, look for him in the several means of his appointment, streets, courts, &c. Put away every thing that mars his presence with you.

## THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.\*

## SERMON XII.

2 KINGS ii. 14,

*And he took the mantle of Elijah, that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah?*

I SHALL NOW,

III. Give the reasons of the doctrine, or shew, that the consideration of God's presence with his people in former days, should bring the succeeding generation to the same God for the same entertainment.

This consideration may and ought to work upon us in two ways.

1. By way of simple excitation and <sup>u</sup>pstirring. When Elisha considered what God had done for Elijah, it set his soul on fire, inflamed his desires, set his heart a-longing after the Lord, that he might deal the same way with him. Thus the consideration of God's gracious appearances to and for his people in former times, should be a powerful motive to labour for the same or like experiences. It should inflame our hearts with a holy emulation, and earnest desire of the blessed entertainment others have got before us at God's door; for the following reasons:—

(1.) Because, so far as we come short of it, it is a sign we are so far off the way where the footsteps of the flock are to be seen, Cant. i. 8; and that is so dangerous, that it may well strike a nail to our heart to think of it. What is the reason we fare not so well about the Lord's hand as others before us? Have we not the same God to go to, the same covenant-promises? We have the same breasts of divine consolations, as full as ever, but it seems we have much lost the art of sucking them, that sometimes has been our experience.

(2.) Because, so far as we come short, it is a sign of God's anger against us, that he hath some quarrel with us he had not with his people in former days of the right hand of the Most High; and may not this prick us to the heart, and set us to our knees? Isa. lix. 12, "For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us." What is it but the sins of the generation, that stops the communication of the divine goodness? Does the Spirit of the Lord depart till he be grieved, or the holy fire go out till it

\* Delivered August 16, 1713; afternoon.

be quenched? Does the Lord close his distributing hand till his people close their mouths? or does not the oil run while there are empty vessels to receive it? While the furious wind of persecution blew on God's people in Scotland, and the sweeping rains fell, sweeping away their earth from about them, the fountain of the divine goodness to them ran freely; but now, alas! through long ease, we have got the springs stopt with our mud and earth.

(3.) Because we have as much need as they had: Luke xv. 17, "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's house have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise, and go," &c. If we be less at God's door than other's before us, it is not, I am sure, for any wealth we have at home, more than they had; it is not that we do not stand in need, but that we are not so sensible of our need. Many of the Lord's people have taken little rest, when they had more than we can pretend to; they have been very anxious to increase their stock, when it was far above ours; and when we consider how fast they ran, when they had reached far above our small measure, should not that stir us up to mend our pace? Phil. iii. 13, 14, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

(4.) Because these glorious examples should not be without due influence upon us. Example is a most efficacious incitement; Cæsar grieved when he saw the statue of Alexander, and considered how he, at the age of thirty, had conquered the world, and himself, being older, had done nothing; Heb. xii. 1, "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with such a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." How may we blush when we consider the stature of those before us, that have been as the palm-tree, while we, growing in the same soil, are like pitiful shrubs! Surely if our spirits were not mightily sunk and degenerate, the glorious example of the Lord's people in former days would set our whole soul a-going after the God of Elijah.

2. It should work on us by way of encouragement. Elijah's example gave Elisha hopes he might find God the same to him he had been to his predecessor. Encouragement is a notable spur to diligence, and is that which is most likely to take with men. What is it which makes us that we wrestle not for God's presence, as in former days? even unbelief, that tells us we need not be at the pains, for it will not do. But the report of the godly in former days con-

tradicts the report of unbelief, and therefore should bring us back to God's door; even as when a beggar, having called at a door for his alms, was coming away without it, and should meet with another that had been plentifully served there, who would say to him, That is a good house, and though one may stand long at the door ere they be served, yet they give ay a liberal alms at length; would not that bring the beggar back again? So should the consideration of God's presence with his people in former days bring us to him for the same entertainment. For this there are the best reasons; such as,

(1.) Because the experiences of the Lord's people in former days were given, and put on record, for that very end. All the experiences of God's presence with his people in former days, are as so many signs of peace on earth, and good-will towards men. They, as it were, stand at God's door, to invite and encourage those of succeeding generations to come in there for the same or like entertainment; and his people do but answer the design of them, when they come and inquire, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"—Eph. xii. 7, "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus."—Rom. xv. 4, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope."

(2.) Because these experiences say there is enough to be had in God for the seeking, if we seek in his own way: Psalm xxii. 4, "Our fathers trusted in thee, they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried to thee, and were delivered; they trusted in thee, and were not confounded." The saints that have gone before us have spread a good report of God's house, that others after them might come to the same door. They have had the experience of the Lord's help in all the cases that we can be in; and whatever be the difficult steps we have to go, if we mark narrowly, we will see the footsteps of the flock before us in these steps through which their God has graciously handed them: Psalm xxxiv. 6, 8, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.—O taste, and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him." And their experiences are their testimony to the truth of his promises: Psalm xii. 6, "The words of the Lord are pure as silver tried."

(3.) Because we have the same advantages that they had, yea, and more than some of them, that lived in darker days than we do. How many have groped the way to the throne of grace, when they had not such light shining around them as we have to shew the way; but, however we make the comparison, we have the same God to go

to that they had, who has as much to give, and is as gracious as ever: Jam. i. 17, "Every good gift, and every precious gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;" the same High Priest over the house of God, that is as well heard by the Father now as ever, Heb. xiii. 8, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever;" the same covenant, for it is everlasting; the same promises, whose truth and mercy endure for ever.

(4.) Because all that ever the best of the saints got was in the way of free grace. It was not only undeserved, but given over the belly of ill-deserving: and if it be free grace that opens the door, what needy sinner is there but may come forward for a share? All the love that was ever bestowed on any of them, was free love, without the least deserving; if ye think there is any exception, look through them all, from Adam downwards, and name the man if you can. Paul challenges the world to do it, Rom. xi. 35, "Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?"

IV. I am now to make some practical improvement. And this,

I. In an use of reproof. This reaches a reproof to several sorts of persons; as,

(1.) To our modern blasphemers, who reckon the saints' experiences of the workings of the Lord's Spirit on their spirits nothing but the effects of imagination, heat of fancy, or somewhat else. So true is it, 1 Cor. ii. 14, "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." But when we consider the sanctifying effects of these operations felt on their spirits, how by these their hearts are loosed from the lusts to which they were formerly glued, inflamed with love to God and his holy law, and thus to despise the world, rejoice in tribulation, joyfully to suffer for Christ, and deny themselves to all that is dear to them in the world for his cause, we must conclude, that these men do but new-model the doctrine of those that taught long ago that Christ cast out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of devils; and that, as their working is formal, suited to the spirit of the natural man; so their spirit is profane.

(2.) Those that slight the experiences of the people of God, and appearances to and for them, as not worth their notice, far less of their pains, to get the same entertainment; and yet they did more service to the cause of God, by their godly simplicity, than we are like to do by our refined prudentials; and no wonder, for if a man will be truly wise, 1 Cor. iii. 18, "Let him become a fool, that he may be wise." A little faith and dependence on the Lord for light

and strength, will go farther than much carnal foresight. But they had the spirit of preaching, praying, and other things belonging to the service of God; and we have the bare act of it. The good Lord send back the Spirit, come of the act what will!

(3.) To those who are ready to talk big of the experiences of God's people, and of God's appearances for them in former days. With a whole heart, their consciences bearing them witness, they are not concerned to wrestle with God for themselves or others now, or to put to their hand, in their several capacities, to the revival of practical godliness in the generation; but, on the other hand, do improve it to the hardening of their own hearts, and to the contempt of ordinances and ministers. These are the genuine offspring of those who built the tombs of the prophets, and garnished their sepulchres, yet are filling up the measure of their fathers' iniquities, Matth. xxiii. 29.—Whence I may observe, (1.) That dead prophets are better liked by a formal generation, than living ones, for they get less trouble of the dead than of the living. (2.) Such would make a brave use of the means of grace that were in former days, which they are sure they cannot get, while they have no power to improve the means that are among their hands. (3.) These will condemn their fathers' misusing of the prophets that are gone, who yet will trample on their successors that are remaining.

(4.) To those who improve the experience of the Lord's people in former days against themselves, to the deadening their own spirits, instead of quickening them, when they look upon them. By the subtlety of Satan, they are thereby discouraged and broken instead of being animated, as they ought, to seek the same entertainment. It is the remains of a legal disposition in any of the children of God, that is the source of discouragements arising from this airth. They look more to the goodness that was in the saints, and the ill that is in themselves, than to the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, through which alone the divine goodness did flow to them, and through which it may flow as freely to themselves.

*Lastly,* To those whose hard thoughts of God the experience of all the saints from Adam cannot remove. So vile are they, they conclude, that God's heart cannot be towards them, though they have all the experiences of former saints, as so many depositions to confirm the welcome of all that come to him through Christ, whatever they have been. O lay by these hard thoughts of God, so destructive to yourselves, and so dishonourable to God. Look among all that ever came to God, if ye can find one that died at his door; if that be your lot, you will be the first; but God's word says you shall not: John vi. 37, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in nowise

cast out." Beware of hard thoughts of God whatever your disappointments be; if the devil can get that point wrought up in you, he has you fair before the wind for hell, where the fearful and unbelieving land: and there is not a readier way on earth than that, to create a hell within a man, a hell, I say, where sin and sorrow for sin are both at a height. But here some may propose this

OBJECT. No other person's case is like mine. ANSW. And there is none good as the Lord; he is goodness itself, infinite goodness, and infinitely good to sinners in Christ; and that is sufficient to swallow up your matchless evil. What think ye of Paul, Manasseh, Adam? But though ye cannot see a case like yours among all the elect of God, you cannot thence conclude your case is marrowless, more than if ye were in a wilderness where ye could see no marks of a person's foot, ye might conclude never one was there before you. But suppose the saints' experiences leave you, yet the word will reach you: Rev. xxii. 17, "And the Spirit and the Bride say, come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely." And if your case be quite new, God will do a new thing according to his word. Some person must go foremost in every case; venture you, then, on Christ with that case of yours, that others that may be in it after may follow, and ye shall find a matchless physician for a matchless malady.—I shall only add,

2. An use of exhortation. Let me exhort all, especially communicants, to seek the Lord's presence and glorious appearances as in former days; and make this your great business, never ceasing till he make himself known, as in the days of old.

(1.) Seek his glorious presence to the spirits of his people, as in former days. The Lord's work here is at a sad stand; cry, "Revive thy work in the midst of the years," Hab. iii. 2. Their bones are in that respect lying dry about the grave's mouth. O cry for the Spirit of life to enter into them! Even the trees of God's planting are become mighty sapless; God's wheat is mighty withered at the root; cry for a shower of influences, that the work within, that is at such a stand, may go on yet, and soul-exercises may be set on foot again.

(2.) Seek his powerful manifestation of himself, to purge the generation's wickedness, and to make holiness more common and shining in our day. There is a deluge of profanity overflowing the land: "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Cry for his appearance, to turn the stream, to make iniquity hide its head, and holiness to settle in its room. There is a glorious promise to the gospel-church, in Zech. xiv. 20, "In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar;" cry for the accomplishment of it, to him with whom is the residue of the Spirit.

(3.) Seek his glorious appearance in ordinances, as in former days, that he would beautify the place of his glory by his presence. Do your utmost to get him into your mother's house, for it is a heartless house when he is away. We have been in pain, we have, as it were, brought forth wind, we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth: "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

(4.) Seek his glorious appearance for his churches, now when they are so low, and the hand of the Antichristian faction is so high: Jer. li. 50, "Remember the Lord afar off, and let Jerusalem come into your mind;" for your mother-church in particular, against which many are gathered, saying, Let Zion be defiled. Behold how pin after pin in her tabernacle is loosed, that it must quickly lie along upon the ground, if the Lord himself do not appear to hold it up. Seek for the revival and preservation of the covenanted work of reformation, that sacred pledge transmitted to us at the expense of the precious blood of many of the saints, the bearing down and destroying of which is like to make these nations yet swim with blood. Our rowers have rowed as into deep waters, where they have sunk our nation, and solemnly buried our covenants in the ruins of it: "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

Cry for their resurrection; and if ye can do no more ye may do as Martha and Mary, that owned their relation to their brother while in the grave; and say as Mary, and these with her, John xii. 34, when Christ asked, "Where have ye laid him?" "Lord!" say they, "come and see."—For motive,

1. Consider that the Lord's appearances and manifestations of himself as to his people in former days, would make a pleasant change on the face of affairs this day, it would be as life from the dead: Isa. xxxv. 12, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God." It would renew the earth's withered and decayed face. If, therefore, you have any respect for the thriving of your own souls, any pity on the perishing souls of a graceless multitude, any regard to God's honour and ordinances, any concern for his ark and work, seek his glorious appearance for his church.

2. Consider that matters are come to such a pass with us now, that nothing less than God's gracious appearance for us, and presence with us, as in former days, can prevent our ruin; we have all grounds to fear an arousing stroke from the hand of the Lord, by

means of a French, Popish, and malignant faction, set to raze our Jerusalem to the very foundation, whose tender mercies are cruelty ; and if we should miss it, which is not likely by all appearance, there will be a blacker sight seen on this church, and these nations, by reason of that spirit of enmity against the purity of religion, and against all practical religion, that has made such dreadful advances this day, that, if God do not seasonably strike in, will, through time, wear out the saints of the Most High.

*Lastly*, Consider the glorious things spoken of the latter times, to which the world seems to be advancing apace. The extraordinary efforts made this day for advancing the kingdom of the devil in the Christian part of the world, the universal decay of piety in the churches look like a critical juncture, when the honour of God is called upon to "arise like a giant refreshed with wine," to purify a people to himself, and to strike his enemies on the hinder-parts. Whatever sad work may be made on the churches before that come, O cry, "Awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord ! awake, as in the ancient days," Isa. lix. 9.—I shall close with a few advices.

1. Stir up yourselves to repent and reform: "Strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die," Rev. iii. 2. It is high time we were bending to our feet, when the fire has begun to catch hold of our bed of sloth ; we have slept long enough, labour now to get and keep matters clear betwixt God and your souls.

2. Lament after the Lord: 1 Sam. vii. 2, "And all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." Upon that they had occasion to set up another Ebenezer. The tears of the Lord's people after a departed God are the ready way to bring back their tender-hearted Lord. Mourn over your own sin, and the sins of present and former times.

3. Study unity, and beware of division, Psalm cxxxiii. 3 ; be more afraid of your own than of other people's sins. This church at best is but weak ; let us not by divisions make ourselves an easier prey to the common enemy, lest God be provoked to cast us into the fire, to make us burn together.

4. Lay out yourselves for the advancement of piety, to stir up one another to holiness, love, and good works. Put to your hand this way to hold up a standard for Christ in the world ; the devil's agents are busy, not only against the out-works of religion, but to sap the foundations of it. What are you doing to strengthen them ? To talk and complain about the defections of the time, will not do it, but apply your main force to advance and strengthen the vitals of religion in yourselves and others.

5. Labour to put yourselves in a posture for suffering ; cast the

burden of earth off your back, and let your shoes be on your feet, your eye on the prize; pursue it over the belly of all hardships you may meet with, and you will readily find God will be with you.

*Lastly*, Pray, pray, lift up a cry for the remnant that is left; let us meet continually at the throne of grace, ministers and people, to trust with him in his ordinances, and to wrestle for his presence.

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CHRIST THE FATHER'S GIFT TO HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE.\*

SERMON XIII.

ISAIAH lv. 4,

*Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.*

In the first verse of the chapter, there is a large offer of grace, and a cordial invitation to all to improve the blessings of salvation. In the second and third verses, the Lord expostulates with sinners for their slighting this offer, and pursuing after other things. Then the invitation itself is renewed, and backed with weighty motives. In all this the Lord has a special respect to the Gentiles, who at that time were strangers to the covenant of promise. In the text, there is a notable ground of encouragement for sinners to come to Christ; the very scope of it is to encourage them to come to him; it is as if God had said, Why are you afraid to come? behold I have given him for that very end, to be a witness, a leader, and a commander to the people. Therefore you may conclude, that he must have a people to believe in him as a witness, follow him as a leader, and obey him as a commander. Did ever any prince give any captain's commission, but when he designed also he should have some under him as soldiers?

In the text, we have a declaration of what God the Father hath done for poor sinners: and because it is an unequalled deed, it is ushered in with a note of attention and admiration, "Behold I have given." He has made a gift to sinners, a gift such as may supply all their wants.

1. Consider the giver; "I," that is, the Father, the contriver and source of the sinner's salvation. None else could give such a great gift, none else had power to make this gift. In regard of the giver, then, it ought to be received with all due respect and gratitude.

\* The time when this discourse was delivered is not mentioned.