

SERMON X.

A LIFTING UP IN CASE OF AFFLICTION.

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me,” &c.—Psalm xlii. 11.

VII. SOMETIMES the discouragements of the saints, are from their outward afflictions, and relations.

So it was here with David; for, saith he, verse 3, “My tears have been my meat day and night.” Whereupon, verse 5, 6, “My soul is cast down within me:” then verse 7, 8, “All thy billows are gone over me:” verse 10, “As a sword in my bones, whilst they reproach me daily:” then verse 11, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?” To the like purpose he speaketh in the next Psalm, verse 2, “Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” then, verse 5, 6, “Why art thou cast down?” So that his inward discouragements did arise very much from his outward afflictions. And thus it is ordinarily with the people of God; for, saith one, Never was any soul afflicted as I have been, and am: I confess indeed that national calamities are very great; but besides national miseries, I have many, and many personal afflictions; and therefore now it is that I am thus discouraged, have I not reason for it? No.

I grant, and confess it no new thing for God’s own children to be much afflicted: “these are they that came out of great tribulations,” Rev. vii. And

When God’s people are so afflicted, they are, and will be very sensible of their affliction; in some respects more sensible than wicked men; for the more apprehensive a man is of God’s displeasure under affliction, the more sensible he must needs be of the burden of it. Now the saints and people of God, in the day of their affliction, are more apprehensive of God’s displeasure than wicked men are, and so in some respects are more sensible of their afflictions. Yea,

As they are, and will be very sensible of their afflictions, so they are very apt to be much discouraged, by reason of them. And therefore said the Psalmist, Psalm cxliii. “Therefore my soul is overwhelmed within me, and my heart is desolate;”

why? Read verse 3, and ye shall find the reason, "Because the enemy oppressed me." And was not Joshua thus exceedingly cast down, when a party of his men fell before the men of Ai? See how he lies on the ground, chapter vii, and what language he speaks; even the same for substance, that murmuring Israel had spoken: for they said, "Would God we had stayed in Egypt:" and saith he, "Would God we had stayed on the other side Jordan:" yet Joshua, a most gracious, holy, blessed servant of God. So that God's own people are apt to be much discouraged, by reason of their afflictions, and outward sufferings. But now I say, let a man's afflictions be never so great, yet if he be in Christ, and have made his peace with God, he hath no reason to be cast down or discouraged, whatever his afflictions be; for, saith our Saviour, "In the world you have trouble; but be of good comfort I have overcome the world:" And the more a man is discouraged under his afflictions, the less able he is to bear it. So long as a man's hand hath skin upon it, he is able to put it into the sharpest vinegar, without smarting; but if the skin be off, it doth smart exceedingly, and he can hardly bear it. So long as a man's bones are knit together, and in joint, he may stand under a great burden, but if the shoulder bone be out of joint, who can bear a burden? And what do all our discouragements, but disjoint the soul, and put the spirit on the rack? Discouragements make afflictions to stay the longer: an impatient patient makes a cruel physician: and the more the child cries under the rod, the longer the rod is continued; what reason therefore, for our discouragements under afflictions?

But this truth will appear if you consider, 1. What the afflictions and sufferings of the saints are. 2. Whence they proceed. 3. What accompanies them. 4. What follows them, and what is wrought by them.

First: As for the afflictions themselves. 1. They are part of Christ's purchase for you. Look upon Paul's inventory, 1 Cor. iii. 21. "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come." So that death itself, the king of terrors and afflictions, is here reckoned amongst the goods and chattels which Christ hath purchased for you, and left unto you; and if death be yours, then all afflictions are

yours; and who will be afraid of that which is his own? 2. They are the gift of God; "To you it is given, not only to believe, but to suffer," saith the apostle. It was the speech of a good man, now in heaven, being once under great afflictions; O Lord, these afflictions are thy pearls, and I will wear them for thy sake. 3. They are but seeming evils; they are real trials and seeming evils. Therefore the apostle saith, "Every affliction seems grievous;" but considering altogether, it is rather a seeming than a real grief. And therefore saith he, 2 Cor. vi. 9, 10, "We are as unknown and yet well known: as dying and behold we live: as chastened, but not killed: as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing: as poor, yet making many rich: as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." In which words as Austin observes, he puts a *tanquam, sicut* AS upon his afflictions; as if his sufferings were but *as* afflictions, and not afflictions. When a man takes any physic, he is sick withal, yet because it is but physic-sickness, you do not call it a sickness; it is *as* a sickness, but not a sickness. Now all the afflictions of the saints, are but their physic, prescribed and given them by the hand of their Father: and therefore, though they be sick therewith, yet it is but as a sickness, not so indeed all things rightly weighed. When an unskilful eye looks upon the threshing of the corn, he saith, Why do they spoil the corn? But those that know better, say, The flail doth not hurt the corn; if the cart-wheel should pass upon it, there would be spoil indeed, but the flail hurts not. Now there is no affliction, or suffering that a godly man meets with, but is God's flail. And if you look into Isaiah, xxviii, ye shall find the Lord promiseth, under a similitude, that his cart-wheel shall not pass upon those that are weak, ver. 27, "For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart-wheel turned about upon the cummin, the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with the rod." God will always proportion his rod to our strength. But though mine affliction be not greater than I can bear, yet if it lie too long upon me (say some) I shall never be able to bear it. Nay, saith the Lord, ver. 28, "Bread-corn is bruised, because he will not ever be threshing it." But what is this to us? Yes, it is a parable, for ver. 26, "His God (speaking of the ploughman) doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach

him." And if the ploughman have this discretion, much more shall the Lord himself; for, ver. 29, "This also cometh forth from the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." I am God's corn, said the martyr, I most therefore pass under the flail, through the fan, under the millstone, into the oven before I can be bread for him. And if our chaff be severed from our graces by this flail, have we any reason to be discouraged because we are thus afflicted? The truth is, the day of affliction and tribulation, is a godly man's day of judgment, it is all his judgment day, he shall never be judged again, so as to be condemned at the day of judgment; "Ye are judged with the world (saith the apostle) that ye may not be condemned with the world." And when the godly man's affliction day is, he may say, Now is my judgment day, and I shall never be judged again; why therefore should he be discouraged, whatever his afflictions be?

And in the second place. This will appear also, if you consider, whence their afflictions come. If all the sufferings of God's people do come from divine love, the love of God in Christ to them, then have they no reason to be discouraged though they be much afflicted. Every rod is a rod of rosemary to them, fruits of their Father's love. And if you look into Heb. xii, ye shall find both the thing proved, and the inference. The thing is proved at ver. 6, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Which he illustrates by a similitude. Suppose a man have two sons, one a bastard and the other legitimate; he will rather give education and correction to the legitimate son, and neglect the bastard: and saith the apostle, ver. 8, "If ye be without chastisement, then are you bastards, and not sons." What then? Ver. 12, "Wherefore, lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees." As if the apostle should say, If all the sufferings and afflictions and chastisements of the saints, do proceed from love, then have they no reason to hang down their hands or heads. But so it is, that all their sufferings come from love, and therefore no reason for their discouragements.

Thirdly. This will appear also, if you consider, what comes with the afflictions of the saints. There comes much supporting grace, much light, much of God's presence,

fellowship and communion with Christ in all his sufferings. Much supporting grace: "Thy rod, and thy staff comfort me." God never lays a rod upon his children's back, but he first puts a staff into their hand to bear it; and the staff is as big as the rod. It matters not what your afflictions be, great, or small, it is all one, you shall be upheld; and upholding mercy is sometimes better than a mercy that you are afflicted for the want of. But the Lord doth not only uphold his people under sufferings, but he gives forth much light therewithal. The school of the cross, is the school of light.* Affliction is our free-school, where God teacheth his children, and learns them how to write, both their sins and their graces. Their sins: so long as leaves are on the trees and bushes, ye cannot see the birds' nests: but in the winter when all the leaves are off, then ye see them plainly. And so long as men are in prosperity, and have their leaves on, they do not see what nests of sins and lusts are in their hearts and lives; but when all their leaves are off, in the day of their afflictions, then they see them and say, I did not think I had such nests of sins and lusts, in my soul and life. Job xxxvi. 6. "He withdraweth not his eye from the righteous:" verse 8, "And if he be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction, then he shews them their works and their transgressions, that they have exceeded." Yea, afflictions do not only discover their sins unto them; but it is God's plaster, thereby he doth heal the same: "Before I was afflicted, I went astray," saith David. And Job xxxvi. 10, "He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity." Yea, these afflictions and sufferings of the saints do not only discover and heal their sins; but do put them upon the exercise of grace: "In their afflictions (saith God) they will seek me early." Yea, they do not only draw out their graces but discover their graces too, which possibly they did never take notice of before. I have read of some foolish youths, that sitting on the water side, upon the bank, and mingling their legs together in the water, they did not know their own legs; but one standing by, and smiting them on the knees with a staff, every one then knew his own legs, and pulled them up. And so

* Via crucis, via lucis.

it is many times ; there is such a likeness between hypocrites' common graces, and the graces of God's children, that the saints do not know their own graces ; Oh, saith one, it is no more than a hypocrite may have ; but then God smites them with some affliction, and so they feel, and see, and know their own graces : and good reason for it ; for when God comes, he discovers all : and when is God more present with his people, than when they are most afflicted ? God useth to be at the back of affliction. There heaven opened to Stephen. Afflictions are the rusty lock oftentimes, which opens the door into the presence chamber. When was Christ with the three children but in the very fiery furnace ? And ye have a standing promise for it, "I will be with thee in the fire, and in the water," saith the Lord. And saith the apostle, "Then doth the Spirit of the Lord and of glory, rest upon his children." Yea, and as they have most of God, when they are most afflicted, so in time of their sufferings, they have most communion, and fellowship with Jesus Christ in his sufferings. Therefore saith the apostle Peter, chap. iv. ver. 13, "But rejoice in as much as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings." The word *partaker* is the same that is used in John ; "Truly our fellowship is with the Father." And the same that is used in the Corinthians, concerning the Lord's supper, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the body of Christ ?" You will all grant that you have communion with Christ at the Lord's supper ; but the same word being used here shows that you have communion with Christ in his sufferings also ; especially when you do suffer for him. And the greater your sufferings are, the more fellowship and communion you have with Christ in his sufferings. Now then, if all this be true, that a christian hath experience of supporting and upholding grace ; much light ; his sin discovered and healed ; his grace exercised and manifested ; God's presence enjoyed ; and made partaker of the sufferings of Christ, in and by his afflictions ; what reason hath he to be discouraged, although he be much afflicted ? But so it is that a christian hath never more experience of God's upholding, sustaining grace ; his sin is never more discovered, and healed ; his grace is never more exercised and manifested ; God is never more present with him, than when he is most

afflicted : and he is never more partaker of Christ's sufferings than in and by his sufferings. Surely therefore, he hath no reason for his discouragements, whatever his afflictions be.

Fourthly. This will appear if you consider the fruit, benefit, end, and issue of your afflictions, and what they bring forth. "They bring forth the quiet fruits of righteousness," and triumph over Satan; for now poor Job may say, Satan, thou saidst I did not serve God for nought; but now the contrary appears. Yea "they work out an exceeding, eternal weight of glory." And if you look into Phil. ii., where we are commanded "to work out our salvation with fear and trembling:" you shall find it is the same word that is used here concerning afflictions; that they work out an exceeding, eternal weight of glory. Now if all my afflictions do bring me in the quiet fruit of righteousness; make me to triumph over Satan; and work out an exceeding weight of glory; have I any reason to be discouraged, although I be much afflicted? Thus it is with all the saints and people of God; though their sufferings may seem to be grievous for the present, yet they bring forth the quiet fruits of righteousness; thereby the saints triumph over Satan; and these sufferings work out an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Surely therefore, a godly, gracious man hath no reason to be discouraged, whatever his affliction be.

But my affliction is not an ordinary affliction; my sufferings are not ordinary sufferings; for I have lost all my comforts and am stript naked of all my former blessings and relations: I have been long afflicted, and many afflictions crowd and press in upon me, like so many waves of the sea: only there is this difference; the waves come and go, but my afflictions come and stay; they come and go not; they all stay upon me at once and I see no end of my afflictions: the floods are risen, O God, the water-floods are risen and do cover my soul; yea and these waters of affliction are so deep, that I can feel no bottom, see no end of them: have I not just cause and reason then to be much discouraged?

No: for what if you have been, or would be drunk with the comforts of your own relations? Noah was drunk with his own wine; and how many are there in the world, that have been drunk, even with the comforts of their own rela-

tions? And if God your Father see, that you have been or would be drunk with your own comforts, have you any hurt, that he hath taken them from you for a time? When a wise father sees that his child falls in love with his maid, one that is much beneath him; doth his father do him any wrong, that he removes her from him, or him out of her sight? It may be the present affection of the child saith, my father deals hardly by me: but will the child's reason say so afterwards? No, but he will rather say, at such a time I fell in love with my father's servant, and if my father had not removed her out of my sight, I had been lost and undone for ever. Now all the creatures are servants to the children of God, and it may be, God your Father seeth that you are fallen in love with them that are much beneath you. Or, suppose that a child be to travel some long journey, and his father gives him a staff in his hand; when he is abroad in the fields, some enemy meets him, and takes away his staff, and beats the child therewithal; but a friend comes in, and takes away this staff from both, both from the child and from the enemy; doth he do the child any wrong, in taking away this staff out of the hand of the enemy? May be the child will say, I pray Sir, give me the staff again, for it is mine; True, saith the friend, child, this staff is yours, but you have not strength enough to use it, and manage it against your enemy, he would wrest it out of your hand again, and beat you with it, and therefore I will keep it from you both: doth he therefore do the child any wrong? Thus it is here: the Lord gives a creature-comfort into the hands of his child, and God intends it for a staff (for bread is the staff of life): but Satan comes, and wresteth his staff out of his hand, and beats him therewithal: then comes Jesus Christ, and takes it out of the hands of both; Oh, saith the child of God, but I pray thee, Lord, give me this creature-comfort, for it is my staff. True child, saith Christ, it is thy staff, but thou hast not strength to wield it against Satan, he will abuse thee with it; therefore I will keep it from thee, and in due time thou shalt have it again: doth Christ our Lord and best friend, do him any wrong in keeping it from him?

Oh, but my afflictions are not ordinary and usual, but new and strange.

You think so; but the Apostle saith, "Think it not

strange concerning the fiery trial, as if some new thing had befallen you." And what if God will carry you to heaven by some back way, and let you in at some back door; hath not he promised to lead us in a way that we have not known?

Oh, but I do not only want one mercy, but I do want another and another; afflictions come thick, and I see no end, I feel no bottom.

And was it not so with David, the type of Christ? Psalm xl. 1, 2, "I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined his ear unto me, and heard my cry: he brought me out also of an horrible pit; (or as some read it, out of an unbottomed pit) out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings." Three things here that are most observable. 1. David was in such an affliction, wherein he did feel no bottom at the first, saw no end. 2. Though he felt no bottom at the first, yet at the last he did, and a rock which God set his feet upon and established his goings. 3. Till he did find this rock, he prayed, and waited patiently, and he was not discouraged. What therefore though our afflictions be as thick as any mire, that therein you do stick so fast, as you cannot get out, that you feel no bottom, see no end; yet if in this case you pray and cry and wait patiently on the Lord, as David did; you shall be set upon a rock in due time, and your goings shall be also established. And whereas you say, that your afflictions are thick and long and hard; how long man? What! is your bush consumed? Do they not make you long more for heaven? When the apprenticeship is hard and tedious, the young man longs for the day of his freedom. Oh, saith he, that I were in my father's house. Oh, that the time of my freedom were come. So here, long and hard afflictions, make us long more for heaven. Now will ye count that too long, which makes you long more for heaven? And as for your relational comforts; did God ever take away the comfort of an outward relation, and not make it up in the sweetness of spiritual relations?

But this is not all my case; for I do not only want such and such comforts, I do not barely want the comforts, and the love of my relations; but I feel the anger, and the smart of them; for my own familiar friends, and acquaintance are become mine enemies; they reproach me, curse me, speak

all manner of evil of me without cause; and this they do since I set my face towards heaven: time was heretofore, when they did love me dearly; but now they hate me, they persecute me, and do all manner of evil to me; and is this nothing? Is not this a just cause, and reason for my discouragement?

No. For if our worst enemies be sometimes our best friends, then what reason is there that we should be discouraged, although we be much opposed? Now so it is many times; as our best friends are our worst enemies by flattering us, so our worst enemies are our best friends by making us more watchful. So many enemies, so many schoolmasters, saith one.* Hath not our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ said, "Our enemies are those of our own house, they shall ever revile you and persecute you; but blessed are you, when they do all this for my name's sake." And I pray tell me whether it is worser to be persecuted or to be a persecutor? Your friends persecute you, speak all manner of evil and do all manner of evil to you, even since you have looked towards Christ; and for his sake they do it, for his sake ye are persecuted, opposed, maligned. But you might have been the persecutor, and they the persecuted. Which is worst? Will you not say, Oh, it is infinitely better to be opposed for the way of God than to oppose; and to be persecuted than to persecute? I would chuse rather to be persecuted than to be a persecutor. God might have left you to be a persecutor, and your persecuting friends might have been persecuted by you; but now that God hath so ordered it by his providence and grace that you are persecuted and they persecutors, have you any reason to complain or to be discouraged? "Know ye not that the world hateth his own?" So long as the pot stands empty and there is no honey in it, the bees and stinging wasps do not gather about it, but if once there be honey in it, then they flock about it. And so long as you were empty of what is good and walked on with an empty heart, no opposition was made unto you. But now these stinging bees and wasps flock about you, what doth this argue but that you have gotten some honey, somewhat that savoreth of good and of Christ, which you had not before? Why

* Totidem inimici, totidem pædagogi.

should you not therefore rather praise God for what you have, than be discouraged under your opposition.

This is not my case. For I praise God I do not meet with any opposition or persecution from my friends, nor do I need; for my very affliction is an opposition unto what is good, my affliction doth indispose me unto what is good, and expose me unto what is evil, to temptations and many sins; it keeps me from duty, from ordinances and opportunities of doing and receiving good; and therefore I am thus discouraged under my affliction, have I not cause and reason now?

No. For it may be that you are mistaken here and think that you are hindered from the work of God, when indeed you are not. We read of Paul that he was whipped up and down the streets like a rogue, that he was oft imprisoned; and who would not think but that his reproaches and imprisonments should hinder him in the work of his ministry? But he saith that his "sufferings turned to the furtherance of the gospel."

When God leads a man into an affliction, then God doth call him to another work. So long as a man is well and in health, he is bound to go abroad and to hear the word; but when he is sick, then his work is not to hear, but to be patient and quiet under the hand of God; then he is called to that other work which his affliction doth lead him to. It may be, your affliction may hinder you from your former work which God hath called you from, but it doth not hinder you from that work whereunto you are now called by your affliction. And what though my affliction doth hinder me from my former work; yet if God will not fault me for the neglect of that, have I any reason to be discouraged because I do not do it? This is certain, that if God call me to a new work, he will never blame me if I lay by the former. You will not blame your servants if they lay by their former work, when you call them to a new. And when God leads into a new affliction, then he doth call to a new work.

And as for matter of temptation and sin, this is certain, that, that affliction doth never expose a man to a new sin, which doth make him sensible of his former sin. Now, as you have heard, the afflictions of the saints do both discover and heal their ~~sins~~ sins, making them sensible of them which

they were not before. And if you look into Psalm cxxv. 3, you will find a promise to this purpose: "The rod of the wicked shall not rest on the lot of the righteous, lest the righteous put forth their hands to iniquity." As it is with a master that sets his servant to beat the dust out of his garment, though he cause the rod or stick to pass upon the garment, yet he will not suffer it to rest so long upon the garment, as it shall be torn thereby. Your affliction is God's rod and he suffers it to pass upon your garment. Why? That he may fetch out your dust therewith; but he will not suffer this rod to rest so long upon you as to tear your garment. "Lest the righteous put forth their hand unto iniquity," saith the text.

And if this fear of yours be a good sign of your grace, then why should you be discouraged in this respect? Now what better sign of truth and uprightness of heart have you than this: that you are therefore troubled at your affliction, because it doth expose to temptation and sin, and because it doth hinder you from what is good; do you not say so? Lord, thou knowest I am therefore afflicted under this affliction, not because of the burden of it so much, but because thereby I am hindered from doing and receiving good, and exposed to such temptations; as for the affliction itself, though it be great, yet Lord, thou knowest I should submit to it and be quiet under it, were I not thereby exposed unto what is evil. Here now is sincerity, here is uprightness, and will you then be discouraged; nay, rather have you not cause and reason to be much encouraged?

This is not my fear, or cause of my discouragement, but I am under a great and sore affliction, so and so afflicted, and I fear I have brought myself into this affliction by my sin: had not my sin been the cause of my affliction, I should not be troubled; but oh, my affliction is great and long, and I am persuaded that my own sin is the cause thereof. Yea, and that which aggravateth the matter is, I cannot find out what the sin is; if God would but discover it to me, I should be more at quiet. But my sin is the cause of my affliction, and I know not what the particular sin is that hath brought me into this affliction. And have I not just cause and reason for my discouragement now?

No; for did not Jonah bring himself into his affliction by

his sin, and yet when did God more fully appear to him, than when he was in the whale's belly? Did not David bring himself into his affliction by his sin: he sinned in the matter of Uriah, and the Lord said, "The sword shall never depart from thy house;" and what was the sword of Absalom, but an affliction which dropped out of that threatening, brought upon him by his sin: and yet when was David's heart in a better frame? "If (saith he) the Lord have any pleasure in me, he will bring me back to the ark again; if not, let him do with me what seemeth good in his eyes." And when did God more fully appear to David than under this affliction? for he prayed, "The Lord turn the counsel of Ahithophel into folly," and God heard him presently. And if ye look into Deut. iv., you shall find a standing promise made for your comfort in this matter: verse 25, "If you shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger; I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you shall soon utterly perish from the land; ye shall not prolong your days; the Lord will scatter you among the nations, and you shall be left few in number among the heathen, and there you shall serve gods, the work of men's hands. But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thine heart and all thy soul." Here was a great affliction, to be driven out into another country. This affliction was caused by their great sins. Yet the promise is, that if from thence, from this valley and bottom, they did seek the Lord, he would shew mercy to them. And all this in the times of the law: and is not God as gracious now in the times of the gospel, as then in the times of the law? And what though you cannot find out what the particular sin is, it is good to search, but sometimes it is better for a poor soul that it is not discovered; for if I be under an affliction for some particular sin, and find it out, then I am once humbled for it, and go no further: but if I find it not out, I search and search, and so am humbled continually for many sins. And therefore I say, it is sometimes better that the particular sin is not discovered. Why then should a godly, gracious soul be discouraged in this respect? Surely he hath no reason for it.

Yet there is one thing sticks with me in regard of personal afflictions, I fear that they do not come from God's love; were I certain that this affliction did proceed from God's love, then I should never be troubled; but I even see the visible characters of God's displeasure and anger, engraven upon my afflictions, and therefore I am thus discouraged: have I not cause and reason now?

No; for if affliction do rather argue God's love, than hatred, then have you no reason to be discouraged. Now though affliction do not argue God's love; yet, I say, it doth rather argue love than hatred. A man may be no father to a child, yet he may correct him: but if two children commit a fault, and a man take the one and correct him, and let the other go, it argues rather that he is his father than not. So, though chastisements do not always argue God to be our Father, yet it doth rather argue his fatherly love than not.

And is there any thing in God, that is not a friend to all the saints? When a man is a friend to another, not only his purse is his friend, his estate is his friend, his staff is his friend; but his sword is his friend. So, if God be a friend to a man, then not only his love is his friend, and his mercy his friend, but his sword is his friend, his anger is his friend. Now God is a friend to all the saints, and therefore his very anger and justice is a friend too. But,

What are those visible characters of love, which are engraven upon an affliction?

If affliction be a blessing to one, then it doth come from love; and if a man can bless God under affliction, then it is a blessing to him. Job's affliction was a blessing to him: why? because he blessed God under it: "The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away, blessed be his name," &c.

If an affliction do end in our love to God, then it comes from God's love to us; for our love is but a reflection of God's love, and it doth flow from his: and if I can say, I love God never the worsen for this affliction, then I may say, God loves me never the lesser, notwithstanding this affliction.

If an affliction teacheth the mind of God, then it doth come from love: "As many as he loveth, he chastiseth;" and, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastiseth, and teachest out of thy law." So that if affliction be a teaching affliction, then it doth come from love.

If it be laid on in measure, and imposed in due and seasonable time, so as a man may grow thereby, then it doth come from love. When a man intendeth to kill and destroy a tree, or to bring it unto the fire, he cuts it at any time, so as it shall grow no more; but if he cut it in a due time, it argueth that he intendeth it for growth. So when God pruneth and cuts by afflictions, in such a time as men may grow in grace, it argues his love.

When God is especially present in affliction, and more present in an affliction than at another time, it argues that the affliction doth come from love. Now whoever you are that make this objection, and fear the affliction doth not come from love, are you not able to say, Thus I find it indeed, though I have been much afflicted, yet through grace I have been able to bless the Lord under my affliction, and to say, "The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away," &c. I love the Lord never the lesser for mine affliction, and the Lord hath taught me much in this mine affliction; I have gained more by my sickness, than by many a sermon; yea, and he hath cut me in due time, for if I had not met with such an affliction at such a time, I did not know what evil I should have fallen into. And this I must needs say, I have had more of God's presence in my affliction, than ever I had before. Well then, be of good comfort, though your affliction be very grievous, yet it doth come from love. And thus it is with all the saints and people of God, and therefore why should they be discouraged, whatever their affliction be?

But though a christian have no reason to be discouraged in regard of his own private affliction, yet hath he not reason to be discouraged, when it goes ill with the public? And thus it is now with us; we see how it is with this poor nation, troubles and calamities from every part, therefore I am thus discouraged; and have I not cause to be cast down, and to be much disquieted now?

Indeed, this is a sad thing; and oh, that we could weep day and night, and pray too, for this poor, bleeding nation! If ever God's people, here in England, had cause to be afflicted, troubled and humbled, under the hand of the Lord, and to run together in prayer, surely they have reason now;

yet, saith the Scripture, " Say to the righteous, in evil times, It shall go well with him." Did ever any calamity come down like a storm upon a kingdom, but God did provide some hiding for his own children? Did he not provide an ark for Noah in the time of the flood, and a mountain for Lot in the time of the fire of Sodom? The worst that man can do, is but to kill his neighbour: death is the worst that can fall; and what is death, but an inlet to eternal life unto the people of God? When the saints in the primitive times came to bear witness by their deaths unto the truth of Christ, then they said, Now we begin to be christians indeed; now we begin to be like to Christ. There is a three-fold death: spiritual death in sin, eternal death for sin, and temporal death which came in by sin. If God spare me from the two former deaths—the spiritual death and eternal death—and only inflict the temporal death, have I any cause to complain? Thus it is with the saints: though they die temporally, yet they are free from the spiritual and eternal death; and what godly man may not say, I could not live long in nature, and shall I now bear witness unto the truth with this little spot of time that remains! Christ died for us, the just for the unjust, and shall not I that am unjust be willing to die for the just! The worst of all is death; the worst of death is gain. When my body is broken, may I not say, if godly, now a poor pitcher is broken, and shall go no more to the well: now a poor prisoner, my soul, is delivered, and I go home unto my Father. But if you look into the viith of Revelation, you shall find what a glorious issue God doth give unto all his people in the times of public troubles: verse 9, " After this I beheld, and lo a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, kindreds and people stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." A robe is a garment of majesty, palms are an ensign of victory; and saith he, I saw them with robes and palms. The world looks upon my servants as poor and of low spirits, but, saith Christ, I look upon them as under a royal, princely garment, in robes and of a princely spirit. And though the world looks upon them as discomforted, yet, saith Christ here, they shall overcome, for they have palms in their hands. But who are these; This scripture tells, verse 14, " These are they which come

out of great tribulations, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." But why are they in white robes, and their robes washed? Because by their tribulations they are washed from filth. Affliction is God's soap: before a godly man goes into afflictions, his very graces are mixed with sin; his faith is mixed and dirtied with unbelief and doubtings, his humility with pride, his zeal with lukewarmness: but now, by his tribulation, his garments and robes are made white, and washed, and he shall be of a more royal spirit, and be clothed with robes. But though the Lord make use of my tribulations thus to wash, yet I fear that by these public calamities, I shall be driven from ordinances, the temple and worship of God. Nay, saith he, therefore, at verse 15, "They are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple." But what though we have the ordinances, if Christ be not present with them? He adds, therefore, "And he that sits on the throne shall dwell amongst us." But though we have the presence of Jesus Christ, yet we may suffer much with want. True, yet verse 16, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb which is the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water." Oh, but yet we may be brought in the meanwhile into grievous straits, and be in a sad and mournful condition. True, but there is a time a coming when all tears shall be wiped away from our eyes; and therefore he adds this, at the 17th verse, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." How should tears be wiped away hereafter, if they were not shed for the present? Though then you do fear it now, and shed many tears, yet all shall be wiped away and not one left. Oh, what gracious dealing is here! Thus will Christ deal with his people in troublous times; and therefore though our condition, in regard of the public, be exceeding sad, and very grievous, insomuch as we have all cause to mourn and weep; yet if you be in Christ, and have made your peace with God, you have no reason to be cast down. And thus it is with every godly man: surely, therefore, a godly, gracious man, hath no reason for his discouragements, whatever his affliction be.

But what shall we do, then, that we may not be discourag-

ed, whatever our affliction be, whether public or private, national or personal? A good man, indeed, hath no reason to be discouraged under his affliction, but it is a hard thing to bear up against all discouragements under great affliction: what shall we do in this case?

Either you have assurance of God's love in Christ or not; if not, this affliction shall be a messenger to bring it to you. So look upon your affliction; and if you have assurance, then actuate your assurance, reflect much on your interest in, and your peace with God through Christ; put yourselves often upon this disjunction—either there is enough in God alone, or not; if there be not enough in God alone, how can the saints and angels live in heaven, who have no meat, drink, nor clothes there, but God alone? And if there be enough in God alone, why should I not be contented with my condition, and comforted under it, whatever it be? What though men hate me, if Christ loves me? Oh, labour more and more to see your interest in Christ, and ever hold it to your eye!

If you would not be discouraged under your afflictions, remember much your fellowship with Christ in his sufferings; thus: Now by these my sufferings have I fellowship with Christ in all his sufferings; and therefore as Christ died, and did rise again, so though my name dieth, estate dieth, body dieth, and all my comforts die, yet they shall rise again. The apostle argueth, and proves, that the Romans should die no more in their sins, because Christ being risen from the dead, died no more; and therefore, saith he, though you fall into sins, yet you shall die no more, because you are risen with Christ. So say I, though your afflictions be great, and seem to swallow up all your comforts, yet your comforts shall not be buried in them; for, if godly, you are risen with Christ, and have fellowship with him, and so die no more. When therefore affliction comes, rejoice in that you are made partakers of his sufferings, and say, "Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy, for though I fall, yet shall I rise again;" for by my sufferings I have fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, and so in his resurrection, comforts and glories.

If you would not be discouraged under your afflictions, labour more and more to be strangers to the world, and to be acquainted with the ways of God under affliction. The dog

doth not bite, or tear, or hurt those that dwell in the house ; if a stranger comes, he flies upon him, and tears him, because he is not acquainted with him. And what reason is there that men's afflictions fly upon them and tear them so much as they do, but because they are strangers to, and know not the way of God under them ; labour therefore to live by faith above the world, to be a stranger to the world, and be more acquainted with the way of affliction.

Consider what Christ hath borne and left you to bear. There are but two things to bear ; sin and sufferings. Christ hath borne all your sins, will not ye bear his sufferings ? He hath borne and carried the heavy end of the staff : you have not one sin to bear, and will you not then bear the sufferings ?

Consider also, and that frequently and seriously, what abundance of good you and others get, or may get by your afflictions. God by afflictions lets out nothing but corrupt blood. Be of good comfort, man, (said one now in heaven, to another complaining under his afflictions,) Christ will do thee no hurt in the latter end. God never whips his children but for their good, and doth teach both them and others by them. I was converted (said one, telling the story of his conversion) by seeing a man executed ; for, thought I, if a man be thus punished with death for breaking one of the laws of men ; what do I then deserve, who have broken all the laws of God ? Affliction sometimes teacheth the bystander much, but especially it is teaching to yourself ; thereby you see and read the fulness of God, the emptiness of the creature, and the vileness of sin. It recalls sin past, and prevents sin to come ; it quickens prayer, and enlarges thankfulness. And it may be thou mayest owe thy conversion to some affliction, as a means thereof ; and if so much good do come by it, will you be discouraged under it ? Think, and think much of the good thereof.

Whenever any affliction comes, do not stand poring on the evil of it, but be sure that you look as well and as much upon what is with you, as upon what is against you : there is no mercy which you can lose, but hath some burden with it : there is no misery that can befall you, but hath some mercy with it. When men lose a mercy, they only consider the sweetness of a mercy lost, and not the burden that they do lose withal. Oh, saith a poor

woman, I have lost my husband, so loving, so gracious, so helpful; but not a word of the burden that is gone withal, and so there is much discouragement. When affliction comes men only consider the evil, and not the mercy that doth come withal, and so they are much dejected. Suppose that a loving father in some high room, throw down a bag of gold to his child, and it lights on the child's head, insomuch as it breaketh his head and causeth the blood to come; whilst the child feels the smart thereof, he is impatient and forward; while he looks only upon the leathern bag he is not thankful; but when he looks into the bag, and sees what a great deal of gold his father hath given him, then he speaks well of his father, notwithstanding all the smart of his head. There is never an affliction, but is a bag of gold given unto the people of God; though it seem a leathern bag without, yet there is gold within; so long as they stand poring upon the leathern bag, or attend unto the smart of their affliction, they are not thankful, they do not praise the Lord, but are much discouraged; but if they would look into the bag, and tell their gold, then they would have comfort, and not be discouraged. I tell you from the Lord, there is gold within; look in this bag, the bag of affliction, tell over all your gold which the Lord hath given you in this affliction, and then you will be quiet. If a mercy be taken from you, consider the burden that is taken away too. If a misery come, consider the mercy that doth come withal; labour ever, labour to see both together, as well what is for you as what is against you, then will you never be much discouraged, although your affliction be never so great.

And thus I have done with the seventh instance.

SERMON XI.

A LIFTING UP IN CASE OF UNSERVICEABLENESS.

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul; and why art thou disquieted within me?” &c.—Psalm xlii. 11,

VIII. SOMETIMES the discouragements of the saints do arise from their employments, work and service.