

## SERMON VII.

## COMFORT TO MOURNERS FOR THE LOSS OF SOLEMN ASSEMBLIES.

*"I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burthen,"* ZEPH. iii. 18.

THIS prophet Zephaniah who lived not long before the captivity of Babylon, having threatened the people of God, the Jews, with that calamity, and exhorted them to repent, to return unto God, that they might prevent that imminent evil, doth at last conclude all, with a comfortable and gracious promise unto the people of God.

First, he threatens, and then promiseth. God's threatenings usually do end in promises; sharpest threatenings in the sweetest promises.

This promise here is sweet, and full, and large; wherein you have the mercies promised, and the several branches thereof.

The cause, fountain, and original of these mercies promised.

The persons upon whom these promised mercies are entailed.

The mercies promised are very many:

The Lord promiseth to return unto his people, verse 9. "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent."

Then he promiseth to free them from their judgments, to bring them out of their captivity, verse 10: "From beyond the rivers of Jordan, my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed shall bring mine offering." And at the 15th verse: "The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy."

He promises pardon, sanctification, verse 11, 12, 13.

He promiseth to gather the poor exiles; "I will gather them that are sorrowful."

He promiseth to destroy all their enemies, verse 19: "Be-

hold! at that time I will undo all that afflict thee." Thus you have the mercies promised.

The cause and fountain and original of all these mercies: the mighty presence of the Lord and his love unto his people, verse 17: "The king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee, thou shalt not see evil any more." Verse 17: "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty, he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing."

As for the person that these promised mercies are entailed upon, they are poor afflicted people that trust in the name of the Lord: "The people of a pure language," verses 9 and 12; and here in this verse such as are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, unto whom the reproach of it was a burthen. "I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burthen."

From whence then I take up this observation.

Though God doth sometimes suffer the solemn assembly to lie under reproach, yet if his people are fully sensible of that reproach, God will turn their former miseries into after mercies; and he will cause their future comforts to run parallel unto their former troubles. For the clearing whereof three things fall under consideration.

First, That God doth sometimes suffer the solemn assembly to lie under reproach.

Secondly, That then those that are true members of the solemn assembly, those be very sensible of it, carry it as their burthen.

Thirdly, That being so, God will turn their former miseries into after mercies, &c.

First, God doth sometimes suffer the solemn assembly to lie under reproach. For the clearing whereof,

We must inquire when the solemn assembly may be said to lie under reproach? And

Why God doth suffer the solemn assembly to lie under reproach at any time?

If you ask, when the solemn assembly may be said to lie under reproach?

I answer: Look when the presence of God is departed from the public ordinances, or solemn assembly, then the

solemn assembly doth lie under reproach. The presence of God in the public ordinances or solemn assembly, is the glory of the assembly, and when that glory is departed, the solemn assembly lies under reproach; though the word of God be preached in an assembly, if the converting, sanctifying, comforting presence of God be gone out of the ordinance, and be not there, it lies under reproach. And though there be government in a church, yet if God's presence be not in that government, it lies under reproach, and the church lies under reproach. Look when the presence of God is departed from the solemn assembly, then it lies under reproach.

Look when a reformation hath been intended, and cannot be accomplished, but is stayed and hindered, then the solemn assembly lies under reproach. Disappointment is reproach. "The children are come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring forth." What then? It is a day of rebuke, and blasphemy, and reproach. Look therefore, when a church or people have been travailing with a reformation, and that reformation proves abortive, stopped and hindered, then that church and people, or solemn assembly doth lie under reproach.

And especially: Look when the ways of Zion mourn, and are unfrequented, then doth the solemn assembly lie under reproach, when the ways of Zion mourn and are not frequented. It was the case that this prophet speaks of; he speaks of the captivity of Babylon, the time of the captivity; what then? Why, saith the church in the Lamentations, the ways of Zion mourn, and are not frequented. When the ways of Zion mourn and are not frequented, the people of God are kept from coming together according unto God's appointment; then the solemn assembly lies under reproach. You read in Josh. v., that when they were come unto Canaan, the first step Joshua circumcised the people, verse 9, "The Lord said unto Joshua, this day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you; wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day." "The reproach of Egypt;" What, were they not circumcised in Egypt? Yes, the children of Israel were circumcised in Egypt, verse 5, "Now all the people that came out were circumcised, but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came

forth out of Egypt, then they had not circumcised." They were circumcised in Egypt; why then is this circumcision called the reproach of Egypt? Though they were circumcised in Egypt, it was at the pleasure of the enemy, they were under bondage, they were not free to the worship of God. But now when they came here into Canaan, the first step into Canaan and they were circumcised; now they were a free people and had liberty not only for circumcision but for all the ordinances, as they had not in the land of Egypt: they could not sacrifice there, but now they had liberty for all; and now the reproach of Egypt was rolled away. So that look when the ways of Zion mourn, and are not frequented, and the people of God are kept from the public ordinances according to God's appointment, then the solemn assembly lies under reproach.

Again, Look when the saints and people of God, the members of the solemn assembly; look when they are scattered and driven one from another that they cannot meet together, then the solemn assembly lies under reproach. Therefore, saith the prophet here, "I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly: I will gather them to whom the reproach of it was a burden," as if the reproach lay in the scattering; and at verse 20, "I will bring you again, even in the time that I gather you, and will make you a name and a praise in all the places where ye have been put to shame." So that the scattering of the members of the solemn assembly is a reproach, and then the solemn assembly lies under reproach.

And, again, look when the state and condition of the solemn assembly is such as that no man cares for it nor seeks for it, then it lies under reproach. Such a state sometimes the solemn assembly falls into. This is Zion whom no man seeketh after. This is Zion whom no man careth for. The magistrate doth not care for it to countenance it. It hath no friends for to help it. If you see a poor man in the streets, neglected, none cares for him, none countenances him, none looks after him to care for him and to help him; you say, he lies under reproach: so when the solemn assembly is in such a case and condition that none cares for it, nor seeks for the welfare of it, those that are in place especially, then the solemn assembly lies under reproach.

But, then, why doth God suffer the solemn assembly to lie under reproach at any time ?

He will sometimes suffer the solemn assembly to lie under reproach that he may roll away the reproach from off the assembly. There is a twofold reproach of the solemn assembly : there is a sinful reproach and there is a penal reproach of the solemn assembly.

Sometimes the members of the solemn assembly are accessory to the reproach of the solemn assembly ; as sometimes they walk and live so as that they are a scandal to the very ordinances. So it is said of the sons of Eli ; sinning at the door of the tabernacle they made the sacrifice of God to stink. Possibly professors may so walk as to make the sacrifice of God to stink, and are so accessory unto the reproach of the solemn assembly.

Sometimes, again, they are exceeding barren and unfruitful under the enjoyment of the solemn assembly. The Hebrews call the winter, חורף, which signifies reproach, for, say they, the winter is the reproach of the earth, because there is no fruit, nothing but barrenness and unfruitfulness ; and therefore they call the winter by such a name as signifies reproach. What a reproach was it to Hannah to be barren ; barren women accounted it a reproach : so reproachful is a barren life among professors.

Sometimes, again, the members of the solemn assembly, they do bear themselves out in their sins upon their enjoyment of the solemn assembly ; crying out, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord ; and are we not delivered to do all these abominations. There is a twofold bearing of ourselves upon the solemn assembly. There is a bearing of ourselves upon the solemn assembly and upon the public ordinances in opposition unto false worshippers. So in 2 Chron. xiii., Abijah bears himself upon the solemn assembly in opposition unto Jeroboam's false worship ; " But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken him ; and the priests which minister unto the Lord are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites wait upon their business : and they burn unto the Lord every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense : the shewbread, also, set they in order upon the pure table, and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof to burn every evening ; for we kept the charge

of the Lord our God, but ye have forsaken him." Thus they did bear themselves, and this was not their reproach but their faith. In verse 18, "Thus the children of Israel were brought under at that time, and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the Lord God of their fathers." They did bear themselves upon the solemn assembly, and their pure enjoyments therein, in opposition to false worship; this was no reproach. But then there is a bearing of ourselves upon the solemn assembly, so as to bear us out in our sin, to cry, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord; sin and live wickedly, and bear ourselves out upon a solemn assembly, that we are members of a church, &c. This is a reproach; this bearing one's self upon the solemn assembly is a reproach: and, saith Chrysostom, Who would not be moved to hear the blasphemings and revilings of the Jews against Christ? But, oh, christian, saith he, take heed thou beest not guilty of the same fault; for he that defiles the king's garment, and he that tears the king's garment offends alike. The Jews tear it, scandalous christians they defile the garment of Christ, the sins are divers, but the reproach the same, saith he. Now then, you see that sometimes the members of the solemn assembly do bring a reproach; they are accessory. God knows how to roll away a reproach by a reproach; and God will sometimes roll away sinful reproach by a penal reproach; and therefore he doth suffer the solemn assembly sometimes to lie under a reproach.

What if God have some great design and work to bring to pass, which in an ordinary way he cannot bring to pass, but through the reproach of the solemn assembly? Suppose that the Lord intend for to scatter and disperse the truth and the gospel; how will he do this, but by scattering his people that are of the solemn assembly? The church was scattered in Acts viii. What then? They went up and down preaching every where. They came to Antioch, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord; and Paul and Barnabas stayed there a whole year preaching, and there those that believed were first called christians. By their scattering, truth and the gospel scattered.

But then, what if God will try his enemies and his friends both at once? Sometimes he will try his enemies, whether they will dare to break open his house, to trample his holy

city under foot; whether they will behave themselves proudly. Sometimes he will try them. Sometimes he will try his own children, how they will carry it in such a day; whether they will lament after God; how they will be affected for the want of the public assembly. God will try sometimes his own children; and where doth God try his children but in that thing wherein they are much delighted? What is that? "One thing have I desired of the Lord, which I will for ever desire, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord." Here is their delight, here is their desire; here God will try them.

But what if the Lord will make the solemn assembly more glorious than ever it was? He hath promised to do it, to make the place of his feet more glorious; that the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of one day as of seven days. He will make the solemn assembly more glorious. How so? but by bringing one contrary out of another. When did God ever put any great life upon any business, but at first he put the sentence of death upon it? When did God ever give any great repute or honour to Joseph, to David, to Mordecai, but first they were brought under reproach. Saith our Saviour Christ, "Unless the seed dies, it abides alone; but if it die, it brings forth much fruit." So with Christ, so with the saints. In Isaiah xxvi., as with himself it was, so it shall be with his: "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise." Bodies once dead and raised again, are the most glorious. Now God doth intend to make the solemn assembly more glorious than ever; no wonder therefore that he doth sometimes, being this is his way and method, suffer the solemn assembly to lie under reproach. So then, you have the first thing cleared in these particulars.

Secondly, But then suppose the solemn assembly do lie under reproach, how will the members of the solemn assembly take it, or be affected with it?

Why the members of the solemn assembly are of two sorts; there are false members, and there are true members.

Some are true members of the church: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."

Some are false members of the church: "They went out from us, because they were not of us," 1 John ii. 19. These

latter, when the solemn assembly lies under reproach, they will not be much grieved, but rather say, Down with it, down with it, even to the ground, with the children of Edom.

But the former, that are the true members of the solemn assembly, the saints and people of God, they will be much affected, saith the text, therefore I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, "who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it is a burthen." These will be much affected, and very sensible of the reproach of the solemn assembly. In Numb. ix. we read of some certain men that were defiled by a dead body, and they were mightily troubled that they were kept from the passover, from one ordinance, ver. 6, 7. Yet the solemn assembly stood. How would they have been affected, if the solemn assembly itself had lain under reproach. In Psalm xlii. you see David is much affected when he was kept from the house of God; yet the solemn assembly stood. How would he have been affected if the solemn assembly itself had lain under reproach? When the solemn assembly doth lie under reproach, those that are the true members of the church and solemn assembly, the saints and people of God in truth, they will be much affected and sensible thereof, and carry the reproach up and down with them as their burden.

You will say, How and why?

How will the saints and people of God be affected, when the solemn assembly lies under reproach?

I answer negatively first: They will not be so affected with the reproach of the solemn assembly as to be incapable of the teachings of God. It is said of Israel, that they did not hear Moses for anguish; so the saints and people of God will not be so affected when the solemn assembly lies under reproach, but they will learn thereby.

Neither will they be affected with the reproach of the solemn assembly, as to be unthankful for what they have; it is thy mercy that we are not consumed. True, the solemn assembly lies under reproach, but it is a mercy of mercies we have that liberty we have.

Nor will they be so affected with the reproach of the solemn assembly as if it were barely their own concernment. Not barely as their own concernment. It is true they are much more concerned in the reproach of the solemn assembly

than others, but they are not affected upon this account, merely because it is their own concernment.

How then; how are the saints and people of God affected with the reproach of the solemn assembly?

They are affected more with this evil than with any evil in the world; and they look more upon this as their great affliction, and are afflicted more at this than at any evil, than any other evil of their own that doth befall them. You know how it was with the daughter of Eli, "Ichabod, Ichabod, the ark of the Lord is taken;" her husband was killed, and she falls in travail, 1 Sam. iv. 21, and being delivered, she names the child Ichabod, saying, the glory is departed from Israel, because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law, and her husband; and she said, the glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken; she names her *husband's* death but *once*, and her *father's* death but *once*? but that the *ark* was taken *twice*, for that she was most affected. "Is there any sorrow like unto my sorrow?" saith the church; why? the ways of Zion mourn and are unfrequented. Thus then the saints and people of God will be affected when the solemn assembly doth lie under reproach.

This affection of their's will continue with them, and abide upon them; they will not hang down their heads for a day, and frolic it afterwards; hang down their heads for a day in a fast; but as it is said of Ahab, "He walked heavily," so they will walk. Saith David in Ps. xlii., "My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? When I remember these things I pour out my soul in me," so you read it; but it should be, *upon me*; I pour out my soul upon me, as waters poured upon the ground: "For I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day." My tears have been my meat "day and night," it is not for a day and there is an end, but "day and night." This affection doth continue with them, and abide upon them, wherever they go, they carry it as their burthen.

Then also they will lay aside their ornaments, that they cannot rejoice in their former comforts as they did before; and the Lord said unto the children of Israel, that he would

not go, would not go up with them; I will send an angel before you, Exod. xxxiii., and drive out the Canaanite, and the Amorite, but, saith he, I will not go in the midst of thee: then the children of Israel stript themselves of their ornaments: when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned, and no man did put on his ornaments; "For the Lord said unto Moses, say unto the children of Israel, ye are a stiff-necked people, I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee; therefore now put off thine ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee. And the children of Israel stript themselves of their ornaments, by the Mount Horeb: and Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of the congregation; and it came to pass that every one which sought the Lord, went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp." The presence of the Lord was removed: they were fain to go out unto the tabernacle: the presence of God was departed, and God said, he would not go with them; and though he had promised them an angel, yet they fall a crying and weeping: oh, the presence of the Lord with us, else we have no comfort; and then they laid by their ornaments: so that look when the solemn assembly lies under reproach, then the presence of the Lord is gone from the solemn assembly; and therefore the saints and servants of God, will and must lay by their ornaments.

The saints and people of God will search into their own ways, and turn from the evil of those ways that have a hand in bringing in this reproach upon the solemn assembly: they will search and turn. In vain is the sense, when there is no emendation. "Is it such a day as I have chosen, for a man to hang down his head? No, to relieve the oppressed, to take off the yokes and burdens:" reformation: but what is it, a dull reformation? No, but it is a reformation led on by prayer, and fasting, and it is such a prayer as is backed with reformation: and thus the people of God are affected under the reproach of the solemn assembly.

But then you will say: what is there in this reproach of the solemn assembly, that the saints and people of God should be so much affected with it?

What, what not?

The Lord himself is well pleased with, and the saints are well pleased in this sense, in the reproach of the solemn assembly.

God himself is well pleased with it: "The sacrifices of God are a broken and a contrite heart;" a hard heart is God's curse, Lam. iii., you read it thus: "Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse unto them." It is not sorrow of heart, for that is a blessing, but obstinacy of heart, a hard heart, so the margin; but in the Hebrew give them a heart with a shield upon it, that may fence off the blow: that when any thing is spoken they may fence it off; give them a fending heart, a hard heart; a hard heart is God's curse: a tender and a soft heart bleeding over the miseries of the church, it is God's sacrifice; God is well pleased.

And the saints and people of God, they are well pleased in this sense. It is recorded of Nazianzen, that knowing there would be freedom from sin in heaven, he desired to die: but then remembering that there would be no mourning for sin in heaven, nor for the miseries of the church, he desired to live: choosing rather to mourn for sin and the miseries of the church, than to be freed from sin: here was a spirit! It is said of the true griever, he grieves and he doth rejoice in his grief. A man that doth truly grieve, he doth grieve and he doth rejoice in his grief: so that in this sense of the reproach of the solemn assembly, God himself is well pleased therewith, and the saints are well pleased therein.

But do you ask what there is in the reproach of this solemn assembly, that the saints and people of God should be so much affected with it.

I answer, There is a darkness falls upon the greatest organ of light: the greatest organ of light is eclipsed, all eclipsed; and the greater vessel or organ of light that is eclipsed, the more dreadful is the eclipse: the sun eclipsed, that great organ of light, it is more dreadful. The great organ of light for the world, it is the solemn assembly: now when a reproach falls upon the solemn assembly, the greatest vessel and organ of light is darkened, and this is dreadful to those that look upwards.

But then the name of the Lord is dishonoured: "The reproaches of them that reproached thee have fallen upon me:" and so the other way; the reproaches of them that reproach

us, and the solemn assemblies, are fallen upon thee, O Lord, and upon thy name. There are three or four things that God doth much delight in, in the world; his truth, his worship, his people, his name. When the solemn assembly is under reproach, his truth is derided, his worship defiled, his children persecuted, and his name dishonoured. Who can behold all these things and not bleed; and not be affected therewithal?

Look when the solemn assembly doth lie under reproach, then all the people of God, the whole generation of the righteous are afflicted, distressed, and as a lamp despised before him that is at ease: who would not grieve to see the necks of all the people of God lie upon the block together, ready to be cut off? Pray do but mind that place in Esther, it is said there, that when the decree came out upon the Jews, that their necks lay all upon the block, in Esther iii., "The decree was given in Shushan the palace, and the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city Shushan was perplexed:" the city Shushan, why the city Shushan? It is not said the Jews: what was the city Shushan, Jews? No, there were a hundred to one in the city, that were no Jews, aye, but the neighbours of the people of God were perplexed. Oh then, is the city Shushan perplexed in such a day; and shall not the Jews themselves be perplexed; shall they not be affected much with it? Then all the saints, their necks lie upon the block. Look but into the Psalms, and you shall see that when the temple of God is defiled, the reproach of the house of God and the persecution of the saints go together, Psalm lxxix. 1, 2. "O God the heathen are come into thine inheritance, thy holy temple have they defiled, they have laid Jerusalem on heaps; the dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth, their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem, and there was none to bury them, we are become a reproach to our neighbours." Aye, these two go together, the defilement of the house of God, the reproach of the solemn assembly, and the persecution of the saints likewise. Now who can see these things and not be affected?

The schoolmen say, That power which cannot be resisted, is a cause of grief. If evil be coming, and I be able to resist

it, I am not much affected: but if evil comes like an armed man, and I cannot resist it, this causeth grief. Now when the solemn assembly lies under reproach, evil comes upon the people of God like an armed man: they cannot resist it, here is grief then.

The schoolmen say, All grief doth arise from the want of the thing loved, and the loss of good. Now when the solemn assembly doth lie under reproach, their good things are lost; the saints' good things: there is the presence of God in the solemn assembly: there is the chariot whereby Christ rides into the souls of sinners: there is the food of faith: there is all good things gone, and therefore no wonder they are so affected: but

Look when the solemn assembly doth lie under reproach, then the world is scandalized, and the world is offended. "Woe to the world because of offences," it is an evil thing that the world should be offended. When is the world offended? when the solemn assembly lies under reproach? Aha, so would we have it. Then they laugh. Saith Paul, who is offended, and I burn not? We say, when the sick man laughs, the physician cries, He is distracted, saith he. Why now the saints and people of God, they are the world's physicians to cure them, and heal them, by their lives and prayers and instructions. What, do they laugh? what do they say: Aha, so would we have it? But when the solemn assembly lies under reproach, then is the world offended. Then therefore is the time for the saints and people of God to be much affected.

Look when the solemn assembly doth lie under reproach, then the devil gets up again. The devil falls by the powerful preaching of the gospel, saith our Saviour Christ. Rejoice not that the devils fall down like lightning before you. What fall? what, doth our Saviour Christ speak of the devils' first fall? no surely, but of his fall by the preaching of the gospel. When the gospel is powerfully preached, then the devil falls. But when the solemn assembly lies under reproach, he gets up again. And what good man would not grieve, when he sees how the devil gets up again; especially if he have seen the falling of the devil before?

Look when the solemn assembly doth lie under reproach, then you have a certain presage of a famine of the hearing of

the word. If one could assure you, that for certain there would be a famine of bread, you would be much affected. Why, the reproach of the solemn assembly is a certain presage of a famine of the word, and the hearing of the word; a certain presage of it.

The more that any good man hath any hand in any great evil that is come, the more he is affected therewithal. It is fabled of the eagle, that when the eagle was shot, looking upon her wound, she was troubled. But when she looked upon the arrow, and saw the feathers of the arrow; nay then saith she, I am killed, and am destroyed by some of my own kind, in regard of the feathers; and this wounded her again, and troubled her more, that she was destroyed by some of her own kind. And truly, when a good man looks upon the reproach of the solemn assembly, may he not see his own feathers? Yes, this reproach of the solemn assembly have I had a hand in. No wonder therefore that it doth grieve him, and that he is much affected.

When the solemn assembly doth lie under reproach, God is departed. Take away God, and I am nobody, saith one. A good heart will always say so. Take away God, and I am nobody. Now when the reproach lies upon the solemn assembly, then God is gone. God is so much departed, and so much gone, as the solemn assembly lies under reproach; so much we do bear the badges of God's departure.

Do you then ask me, what there is in this reproach of the solemn assembly, that the saints should be so much affected therewithal? There are these two things, and judge you whether there be not cause, that all the saints and people of God should be much affected, and carry it as a burthen upon their souls, when the solemn assembly lies under reproach? And thus I have done with the second thing, that those that are of them, those that are the true members of the solemn assembly, they will be very sensible of it. And you see the reasons of it.

But suppose the solemn assembly do lie under reproach, and we have been, and are very sensible thereof, and carry it as a burthen. What then?

Then will the Lord turn your former sorrow into future comforts. Then will the Lord return unto you with joy. Then shall you certainly be comforted, and God will make

your after comforts, to run parallel with your former troubles. "Blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Those that sow in tears they shall reap in joy." As surely as now you go forth, carrying precious seed: the sense of this condition upon your hearts, you shall return again with your sheaves of joy with you.

But wherein lies this parallel, and how shall our after comforts run parallel with our former troubles, in case we be thus sensible?

The scripture tells you; in case that you have been scattered in the day of the reproach of the solemn assembly; in case you have been scattered, then the Lord will gather you; your gathering shall answer to your scattering. I will gather them that are sorrowful; gather, he will gather you under his wing, as a hen gathers her chickens. "O Jerusalem, &c. How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." Gather you, as a shepherd gathers his sheep into his fold, and he will gather you into his bosom; and therefore saith our Saviour Christ, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in." The word is, you gathered me. "I was a stranger," and ye gathered me not. Why? because when the Lord gathers, then he takes us in and receives us into his bosom. So that in case you have been scattered, then will the Lord gather you.

In case that you have halted in the day of the solemn assembly, then the Lord will heal you. Behold, saith he. "I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out." Mark, there is a great matter in it, if that you be sensible of the reproach of the solemn assembly: I will save her that halteth; halting notes weakness. I will strengthen you in opposition to all your weakness. Halting notes an uneven course: a man that halts, inclines this way and inclines that way; sometimes he bends to the right side, and sometimes to the left: so when men halt in matters of religion; how long will ye halt between two opinions; sometimes he bends this way to the truth, and sometimes that way against truth. Now in opposition to all this uneven course of yours, saith the Lord, I will heal her that halteth: though thou hast halted in the day of the reproach of the solemn assembly, yet I will heal thee, and I will save thee, saith the Lord.

In case that you have suffered reproach in the reproach of the

solemn assembly, saith the Lord, in the 19th verse, "I will get them praise and fame in every land, where they have been put to shame." Have you suffered reproach in the day of the reproach of the solemn assembly; have you suffered reproach? "I will get you fame and praise;" yea, I will get you fame and praise in the very place where you have suffered reproach, yea, *in all* the places where you have suffered reproach.

And, saith he in the last verse, "When I turn back your captivity before your eyes." Sometimes a man's name is vindicated when he is dead. God vindicates him from reproach when he is dead. But saith he, "I will get you fame and praise even before your eyes; in the very place where you have been put to shame," there will I get you fame and name, and your eyes shall see this. So that thus then you see the parallel: if that the saints and people of God be sensible of the reproach of the solemn assembly, God will turn their former miseries into after mercies, and he will cause their after comforts to run parallel with their former trouble.

By way of application then:

If these things be so: rejoice not over us, oh, our enemies, for though we be fallen, yet we shall rise again. Speak no more arrogantly, oh, ye children of man, though the righteous fall seven times, he shall rise again.

If this doctrine be true, what a mighty difference is here between a godly man and a wicked man, in reference to his dealings with God, and God's dealing with him. In reference to his dealing with God, a wicked man looks upon a solemn assembly with an evil eye, and it is his burthen, he cries, The burthen of the Lord, the burthen of the Lord. A good man looks upon the reproach of the solemn assembly as his burthen. The solemn assembly itself is a burthen to a wicked man, the reproach of it is a burthen to a good man. Well now, as for the wicked, his laughter shall be turned into mourning; as for the godly his mourning shall be turned into comfort.

But if this doctrine be true, what abundance of comfort is here, for all you that have been sensible of the reproach of the solemn assembly! It cannot be denied, but this day the solemn assembly lies under reproach; then you that

have carried this reproach up and down with you as your burthen, and have been sensible of this reproach of the solemn assembly, be of good comfort, the Lord will turn your present miseries into future mercies; the Lord will cause your after comforts to run parallel with your present troubles.

You will say, this comfort doth relate to the future, but I have none for the present.

Yes, you know it is said, the Lord comforteth *in all* our tribulations; it is not said *after* our tribulations, but *in* them. There is comfort in our tribulations; "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God: Blessed are those that *mourn*, they *shall* be comforted: and blessed are the pure in heart, for they *shall* see God." But "blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." So that here is comfort for the present.

But you will say, All this comfort hangs upon a condition; this promise doth run conditionally. Here is a great promise of comfort indeed, but it is upon condition, being sensible of the reproach of the solemn assembly, and *I have not* been sensible, and *I am not* sensible.

No, pray stay a little: Not sensible! It may be you are not sensible of your sense. As a man may be sensible of his unsensibleness, so a man may be unsensible of his sense. As a man may not believe that he doth believe; so a man may not be sensible of the sense that he hath of the cause and misery of the people of God. When a poor man comes first into the prison, he is sensible of the smell of the prison, afterwards he is not sensible of his sense, but he hath a sense still; so now it may be, you have been so used to be sensible of the reproach of the solemn assembly, that it may be you are not sensible of your sense.

But I pray tell me, if that you have borne the reproach of the solemn assembly upon your hearts before God in private; have you not been sensible? If you have fasted and prayed in reference to the reproach of the solemn assembly; have you not been sensible? Our Saviour Christ expounds the one by the other. There came to Christ the disciples of John, saying: Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? Jesus said unto them: can the children of the bride-chamber mourn? &c. He

expounds fasting by mourning: and if you have been more afflicted with the reproach of the solemn assembly, than of any other thing, and have walked heavily under the burthen of it; certainly you have been sensible.

But whereas you say, This promise doth run conditionally, and this condition you have not attained; give me leave to say to you, do you rightly understand a condition? a condition properly is that upon the account whereof a thing is done, and without which thing it cannot be done.

As for example, I sell my commodity for money, now upon the account you pay so much money, I give you the commodity, and without that I do not give it. Now I pray, will you say, that *your own sense* at the highest is that upon the account whereof God will shew mercy; or will you say that God will not shew mercy unless you have *sense*? We find that God doth return unto his people first, and afterwards he saith, *then* shall ye be ashamed, and *then* shall ye loathe yourselves; it is very true, that he will shew mercy to those that have *sense* of the solemn assembly; but where doth he say that he will shew mercy to those that have no sense? No where; for his love and grace is free. But if any man be sensible of the reproach of the solemn assembly, lo, this comfort is laid up for you: Are you scattered? The Lord will gather you. Have you halted in this day of the reproach of the solemn assembly? God will heal your halting. Have you suffered reproach? In the very place where you have suffered reproach, God will give you a name, and fame, and glory. I must say it, Lift up your heads, oh, ye saints, you that hang down and are sensible of the reproach of the solemn assembly.

You will say now: But what should we do that we may be more sensible of the reproach of the solemn assembly? It is clear, the solemn assembly doth lie under reproach, and God hath promised all this comfort to those that are sensible of it. I hope I have some sense; what shall I do that I may be more sensible of the reproach of the solemn assembly, that this comfort and this promise may come upon my soul?

Get spiritual life, you must be living; a dead man is not sensible. A living man is sensible of the scratch of a pin, a dead man is not sensible of the gash of a sword; it is life

that makes one sensible; never think to be sensible, and to be dead; therefore go to God for spiritual life.

Then strengthen your love unto God, and his ways, and children, and ordinances; *Dolor amoris filia*, grief is the daughter of love; I grieve for the loss of what I love, and no further than I love. If you would grieve and be sensible of the reproach of the solemn assembly, strengthen your love: love to the ordinances, love to the solemn assembly, love to God. And

Then take advantage from all those occasions that you meet withal, to enlarge your mourning, and your sense. When a man would leap far, he takes his rise upon a mole-hill, that he may leap the farther. Friends, you have many rises this day, for your mourning, and for your sense; improve all those rises, as you meet with any occasion, look upon them as so many mole-hills, look upon them as so many rises for to go the farther in your sense of the reproach of the solemn assembly.

Then observe what those evils are, those sins are, that have had a hand in bringing this reproach upon the solemn assembly, and do not meddle therewithal; take heed you do not add any of them to the heap. If a man have a burden upon his shoulder, that he cannot stand under, and you go to lay any more upon him, saith he, I pray take heed, I have as much on me as my back will bear: and if there be company in a boat, that the boat be full, and another offer to come; Oh no, by no means, the boat is ready to sink already; truly thus it is, the boat is ready to sink already, it is so full. And do you look upon the reproach of the solemn assembly as your burthen? Oh, then, take notice what it was that brought the reproach, and take heed of that.

Take heed of the immoderate use of any creature comfort. Friends, let me say this to you; the more your hearts do soak into the comfort of the creatures, the less cause you will have of the reproach of the solemn assemblies. The more your hearts soak into the comforts of your own house, the less sensible you will be of the reproach of God's house. So that take heed of the immoderate use of any creature comfort that is before you.

To end all,

Above all things strengthen your faith; for although sense

be an enemy to faith, faith is a friend to sense; especially sense of sin, and sense of the church's miseries. The more you look upon the fulness, and the freeness, and the certainty of the promise of deliverance, the more your faith will be strengthened. Now this promise of deliverance here, is full, is free, it is large, it is repeated again and again; in Micah iv. you have the same promise, and it is there repeated again and again.

Why then should you say not thus? Well, through the grace of God, though I be sensible of the reproach of the solemn assembly, yet I will believe for deliverance, and though I do believe for deliverance, yet I will be sensible through grace, of the reproach of the solemn assembly. Do so; only let your faith be the mother unto this sense; therefore take this promise, read it over, work it, chafe it upon your hearts much when you are alone. I conclude reading it: saith the Lord here, "I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burthen: Behold, at that time, I will undo all that afflict thee, and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out: And I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame: At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you, for I will make you a name, and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord."

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## SERMON VIII.

### THE EVIL OF UNBELIEF IN DEPARTING FROM GOD.

*"Take heed brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."* HEB. iii. 12.

IN these words three things are the most considerable.

A great disease that christians are subject to, to depart from God.

The cause of that disease, an evil heart of unbelief.

The cure of that disease or the remedy against it; and