

Now then, as ever you desire that the holiness of your conversation may be advanced; that you may be as godly now in your thoughts, as ever you have been ungodly; that God may take nothing unkindly from you; that you may have a constant relief against all afflictions, both inward and outward; that you may live on God; that your hearts may be subdued unto God; that God may give out his loves unto you; that you may be very godly; that you may have a testimony in your own souls that you are truly godly; that you may suck out the sweetness of all the things you know; that you may be let into the secret of godliness, and not stand at the door of knowledge only; that you may never lose a precious hour, but redeem your time: now to the work of meditation; and you that have neglected it so long, be not ashamed to begin it at last.

SERMON IX.

GOD'S RETURN TO THE SOUL OR NATION.

“Return, O Lord, how long, and let it repent thee concerning thy servants,” PSALM XC. 13.

THIS psalm is a “psalm of Moses the man of God,” saith the title.

Wherein he doth strengthen his faith, and the Israelites' faith in God; shews the misery and frailty of man's life, and petitions God for his mercy.

He sets down the misery and frailty of man's life, in the body of the psalm. But before, in the beginning of the psalm, he doth strengthen his own and others' faith in God.

A man is never fit to look upon the troubles of this world, and the miseries thereof, until his heart be established in God by believing. This therefore he doth, in the first place, by several arguments of comfort.

First drawn from their interest in God. Verse 1, “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.” As if he should say, We are now in the wilderness, and so no

abiding place ; well, " Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations."

Faith finds that in God which we want here below, and that is the way to true comfort.

The second is drawn from the eternity of God's essence and being: " Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God," verse 2.

The third is drawn from our resurrection. Though now we die, and are destroyed, yet, at verse 3, " Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest, Return, ye children of men."

Our resurrection is an easy work with God ; it is but saying, " thou sayest, Return, ye children of men."

The fourth is drawn from the shortness of the time that lies between our death and the resurrection: for it will be said, there is a great deal of time between our death and the resurrection ; but, saith he, you must account as God accounts, for at verse 4, " A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday, when it is past ; and as a watch in the night." These things being thus premised, now you may read over the miseries and troubles of this world, which you have at large from the 5th unto the 12th verse.

But what then, what is the work and duty of the psalmist then ? Why, then he petitions God.

He petitions first for wisdom ; that by all the troubles and miseries of this life, he may provide and lay in for eternity. " So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom," verse 12.

And then he petitions for the return of God's love. " Return (O Lord) how long, and let it repent thee concerning thy servants." Where you have the matter of the petition, the explication, and the reason thereof.

The matter of the petition in those words, " Return, O Lord."

The explication thereof, " And let it repent thee concerning thy servants."

And the reason, "How long." Thou hast been long absent ; O Lord, how long wilt thou be absent, how long wilt thou be angry ? Return, O Lord ; how long ; and let it repent thee concerning thy servants.

God is said to return, when after some judgments for sin, he doth shew forth some fresh tokens of his love and favour.

God is said to repent, when he doth change his dispensations of anger into love. And this is that which the psalmist doth here most desire; from whence I take up this doctrine or observation:

When God is in any measure departed from his people, it is their great desire that God would return unto them, and repent him concerning his servants. For the clearing and prosecuting of which,

First, I shall labour to shew you, that God doth sometimes forsake, desert, and depart from his own people for a time.

Secondly, That they are very sensible of such departures, and think it long.

Thirdly, That then, in the time of those departures, their great desire is that God would return. And,

Fourthly, That when God doth return unto his people, then he doth repent him concerning his servants. And,

Fifthly, What we should do in case God should be in any measure departed from us, that he may return again unto us.

First. As for the first: God doth sometimes desert and forsake and depart from his people for a time. Not in regard of their union, so he never departs; but in regard of communion and manifestation, so sometimes he doth. Though nothing is hid from the heat of this sun, yet our souls may be hid from the light of this sun: God doth sometimes depart from his own people.

For he is the sovereign Lord of all. And what if God will, to make his power and sovereignty known among his own people, sometimes withdraw, forsake and depart from them. Twice you read in the book of the Canticles, that Christ withdraws from the spouse: once upon occasion of her sin and security, and then she meets with blows, Cant. v.; once upon an account of his mere pleasure, Cant. iii.

As whom God will he shews mercy to, and whom he will he hardens; so whom God will he is present with, and whom he will he is absent from. He is the sovereign Lord over all. But,

What if God will that his people should have a taste of hell in this life, that so they may be sensible of and very thankful for their deliverance from hell and the wrath to come. There

are three things in hell: torment of body, horror of conscience, loss of God.

By our pains and torments, gouts and stone, we think of the torments of hell, or may think.

By the horror of conscience that we meet withal, we may think of the horror of conscience there.

And by God's withdrawing and God's departing from us here, we may think of the loss of God for ever there.

These things are not in perfection here. In heaven there is nothing but the presence of God, and all the comforts there flow from that fountain. In hell there is nothing but the absence of God, and all the miseries there flow from that fountain. This life lies between both. And what if God will, that we may be sensible of the great deliverance from the wrath to come, give us a taste of hell, by his withdrawings and by his departings from us for a season.

I am sure it is very fit that we should be conformed unto Jesus Christ. As Christ was conformed unto us, in reference to our temptations, so it is fit we should be conformed to him in reference to his desertions. Christ was deserted, Christ was forsaken: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Surely the disciple is not above his Master.

But I am sure of this, that God loves to see the workings of all our graces, our faith and love especially. There are some graces that do not open nor shew themselves but in the sun-shining day of God's presence. When the sun shines the marigold opens. When the sun shines, the fish that lay at the bottom of the water in a cloudy day, swim at the top of the water, and are seen. In the sun-shining day of God's presence, then, our thankfulness, our joy, our assurance float and are to be seen upon the top of the water. But there are other graces, that are best seen when God withdraws, and when God is absent—faith in God, and love to God especially.

Faith in God; for faith works best when it works all alone, without the auxiliaries of comfort. It is no great matter for a wife to believe her husband's love when he is at home and daily and hourly shewing kindness; but when he is abroad, and absent, and she hears not from him, then to believe his love is somewhat. So to believe the love of God toward us when he is present is no great matter, though it is good; but

when God is gone, when God is absent, then to believe his love, is faith worthy of God, as Parisiensis speaks.

Thus, also, our love unto God doth and will appear. For when God is present with us, and shines upon us, then we see God's love to us; but when God is absent from us, by our longings after him, then we see our love unto God. Now, I say, what if God will, to draw out all our graces, and that he may see the workings of our graces, faith and love especially; what if he will withdraw and absent himself from his people for a time? But,

What if God will, for the good and benefit of others, withdraw and absent himself and depart from his own people? In the book of Canticles we find that when Christ doth withdraw from his spouse, and she could not find him, chap. v. 6, she searches after him, inquires for him, makes great complaint. Then the daughters of Jerusalem say, "Whither is thy Beloved gone, O thou fairest among women; whither is thy Beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with thee?" So long as he was present others were not drawn on for to seek him with her; but now he is absent, and she looks after him, and complains for want of him, now others are drawn to inquire after him.

And why so? But to teach us thus much; that God will so overrule the desertions of his people, that his withdrawal from them shall draw others to him. And thus now you see, there is reason, and good reason why God should sometimes depart from, forsake, and be absent even from his own people for a time. And that is the first thing.

Secondly, The saints and people of God are very sensible of his displeasure. "How long, Lord?" They are most sensible of this, they look upon it as a very tedious thing, and most afflictive, to lie under God's departure. "How long, Lord?"

Words of expostulation note affection, especially if they come with an ingemination; and so you have it in the xiiiith Psalm: "How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord, for ever; how long wilt thou hide thy face from me, how long shall I take counsel in my soul?" Four how longs. How long, how long, how long, how long. It is a very tedious thing, and most afflictive to the people of God, to lie under God's departures.

It was so with Christ: ye may measure the hearts of the saints by the heart of Christ. The first in every kind is the rule of the rest. Christ was the first of saints. Now though our Saviour Christ met with many afflictions and troubles in his death, you shall find he is most sensible of God's departure: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He doth not say, Oh, my disciples, why have you left me, and why have you forsaken me; but, "My God, my God, why hast *thou* forsaken me?" That is not the greatest affliction that weak men account the greatest: that is not the greatest burthen that a weak man accounts the greatest; but that which a strong man accounts the greatest burthen is the greatest burthen. Why now that the Rock of Ages, Christ himself should complain under this of God's forsaking, what doth this argue? When Paul cries out, "Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death;" will you not conclude thereby that the body of death was a great burthen, that the sin of our nature was a great burthen? So when Christ himself shall cry out and complain of God's forsaking and departing, will you not conclude, then, surely this is a burthen indeed? This is that the saints and people of God are the most sensible of.

It is the property of a gracious soul to be most affected with the inside and the spiritual part of mercies and of deliverances. Though God give them outward deliverances, they are not so much affected with the outward part as with the inside and the spiritual part of the deliverance. And therefore, in Micah vii. 18, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage: he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy." It was an outward deliverance that God gave them, but the church is most affected with the spiritual part of it.

And as they are most affected with the spiritual part of a deliverance, so they are always most affected with the inward and the spiritual part of an affliction. What is that? The anger of God, the displeasure of God, the desertion of God, the departing of God. This is the thing that the saints, therefore, are the most affected with and the most sensible of.

That is most afflictive to a gracious soul which is most contrary to him and to his will: all that is affliction which is

contrary to one's will. It was no great matter, in itself, that Mordecai did not pull off his hat and bow his knee to Haman; it was no great affliction in itself, but it was contrary to Haman's pride, and that is an affliction that is contrary to one's will. Now what is the will and what is the desire of the saints but the presence of God? That they may ever be at their Father's knee, that they may ever be in his arms, and held in the embraces of his love, held in his smiles; this is the thing that they do most desire. And therefore in the very beginning of the Canticles, "Kiss me with the kisses of thy mouth." This, therefore, being the thing that they do most desire, the contrary must be the most afflictive.

That must needs be most afflictive which hinders them in all their enjoyments. Without the presence of God they have no enjoyment, their enjoyments are as no enjoyments: the presence of God with them is the top of all their enjoyments. If the sun be down, it is not all the torches and candles lighted up that will give you a day; and if God be gone, it is not all your creature comforts will give you joy. Take away the word *my*, take it away from the word *God*, you take away the comfort of the word *God* if you take away the word *my*. And therefore, whereas the Lord had used to call the Israelites *his* people, and God had a little forsaken them; he saith to Moses, *Thy* people, and, *the* people; but not, *my* people. But then,

Thereby the saints and people of God are exposed to great temptations. When God goes the devil comes. And so far as God doth go, so much the devil comes. If God do forsake and depart from a man as to final rejection, then the devil comes in a way of possession. If God departs from a man in a way of desertion, then the devil comes in a way of temptation. As God goes so the devil comes. Now is it not a grievous thing for the saints and people of God to be exposed to temptations? Thus they are by the departure of God, and by the absence of God; by the withdrawments of God. No wonder, therefore, that God's departure is the most afflictive to them. And that is the second.

Thirdly. But, then, as the departings of God are the most afflictive to a gracious soul; so when the Lord is in any measure departed, it is the great desire of the saints and people of God that God would return. Not that God would

take away his hand, the psalmist doth not say so: We are afflicted, Lord, take away our affliction; no, but "Return, O Lord, how long." They did not say, We are in this or that distress; take away this distress and misery from us: no, but "Return, O Lord." This is the great thing that they do most desire. When God is gone in any measure, or departed from them, their great desire is that God would return unto them: and it must needs be so. For,

What is the presence of God but the most desirable thing in the world: "When the days of refreshing shall come from his presence." It is the presence of Christ that will make the day of judgment, a day of refreshing. God's presence is the saint's pleasure. In it there is a filling up of our indigent nature. In it there is the obtainment of our last end, with the knowledge thereof. In it there is an universal good. God's presence is the most desirable thing in all the world. No wonder then that when God is departed in any measure, the saints should above all things in the world, desire that God would return again. But,

God never returns empty handed to his people. If a husband be long absent from his wife, he will not return empty handed; I am sure God will not return empty handed unto his people. When he hath stricken them, he will let out more love unto them than ever before. It was a sad and a sharp dispensation, that the basket of good figs should be carried away captive with the basket of bad figs; but see how God returns unto them, not empty handed, Jer. xxiv.: "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place, into the land of the Chaldeans, for their good; for I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land; and I will build them, and not pull them down, and I will plant them, and not pluck them up; and I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God; for they shall return unto me with their whole heart." See how God returns; when he returns, he doth not return empty handed unto his people. When God returns unto you, he will not only pay you the

principal of your enjoyment ; but will pay you all your forbearance money too. But, and especially,

Take the saints and people of God, and where do they live, but in the love of Christ's person, not of his benefits, not of his comforts, but they live in the love of his person. Look into the book of Canticles and you shall find, how the heart of Christ is drawn out in love to the person of the spouse ; " Let me hear thy voice," saith he, " for thy voice is sweet, and thy countenance is comely : how fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse ; thy lips, oh my spouse, drop as the honeycomb," and so he goes on insisting in his love upon the person.

So doth the spouse also towards him, " My beloved is altogether lovely," and as you read, " my beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand." And so she goes on. Thus love is drawn out towards the person of Christ. Now, if this be the spirit, and if this be the disposition of the saints and people of God, that they live in love to the person of Christ, then no wonder that when Christ is withdrawn, they do above all things desire that he would return again. This must needs be, for they live in the love of his person, and not of his benefits, not of his comforts ; therefore above all things they say, Return, O Lord, return.

Fourthly, When the Lord doth return unto his people, he doth then repent him concerning his servants. Return, O Lord, how long, and let it repent thee concerning thy servants. For the opening and clearing of this, four things briefly :

What it is for God to repent.

Whether God doth at any time repent, or will at any time repent.

How it may appear that when God returns unto his people, that then he will repent him concerning his servants. And,

How should we know in the day and time of God's departure from us, that God will again return unto us.

If you ask what it is for God to repent,

I answer, It is to change the dispensation of his anger. God doth not repent by the changing of his affection, but he repents by the changing of his dispensation. As when a man is writing, and he blots out what he hath written, he

repents that he had wrote such a thing; so when God is writing hard things against his people in a way of dispensation, and he shall blot out that dispensation, then God is said to repent. So it repented the Lord that he had made man, Gen. vi.

If you ask, Whether God doth or will at any time repent?

I answer, Yes, expressly in Exod. xxxii. 14: "And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people." It is a direct answer of prayer to the very words at the 12th verse, Moses prays: "Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people." And at the 14th verse: "The Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people." God doth and will sometimes repent.

Only you must know, God will more easily repent of his judgments than of his mercies. And you must know that the gifts of God are of two sorts: ordinary and common gifts, and so God repents of them, and he takes them away, "It repented the Lord that he had made man." Of the gifts of God that concern effectual vocation, so God repenteth not; for the gifts and callings of God are without repentance. Those gifts that concern our effectual vocation, those God repents not of.

But then, how may it appear that when the Lord doth return unto his people, that then he will repent him concerning his servants?

Why that appears by the thing itself. If a man say he will go from such a town and never return again, and then do return, he doth repent him concerning the thing, by his return; and so concerning God. In Jer. xviii.: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." Well,

But then, how shall we know in case God be absent, or God be departed, how shall we be able in the time of God's absence, or departure, to know that God will return again. Suppose that God be withdrawn from my soul in particular, I am this day under a spiritual desertion, how shall I know that God will return again to me. Or suppose that God

have forsaken, and departed much from the nation, how shall we know whether God will return again or no ?

Indeed it is a very hard thing to bear the departures of God ; but yet if I did know that God would return again, I should be comforted ; how therefore shall I know, both in reference to my own soul in particular, and in reference to the nation, that God will return again ?

Here are two cases, and I shall speak all along to both.

If your question do relate unto your own particular case and soul. I answer thus ;

You may know it by your relations. If you be in covenant with God ; God will return again to you though now he be absent ; “ Though he afflict you with rods, his loving kindness will he not take away, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail.” Will a father or mother leave their child ? no ; I am sure God will not. Joseph was under a great displeasure with his brethren, yet notwithstanding at the last he could hold no longer, but he bursts out, and saith “ I am your brother Joseph.” And so though you be under some great displeasure from Christ, yet there is a time when Christ will break forth and say unto you, I am your brother Jesus. And I say, if you be in covenant with God, you may conclude it, for so doth the Psalmist, Psalm xlii. 11. “ I shall yet praise him.” My soul, thou art cast down and disquieted, but be quieted, “ for I shall yet praise him.” Why, “ he is the health of my countenance, and my God.” You may know it then by your relations. But

Though God or Christ be gone, and in a great measure departed from your souls, yet if you cannot leave God, God cannot leave you. In our conversion, God comes to us before we come to him. But in apostacy we depart from God, before he departs from us. How is it therefore with you ? Can you say truly, my soul cannot leave God, then conclude and say, God will return again, and cannot leave you. But

Though God be very much gone, and departed from you in a great measure ; yet if in the time of his absence he doth send you letters and tokens of love you may know for certain he will return again. Possibly God or Christ may appoint an affliction to bring you a token, or to bring you a message of love in the time of his absence. Possibly, he may appoint

or order some providence to bring you a token, or some message of love. Possibly he may order and appoint upholding mercy, to be a pledge to you of delivering mercy. And believe it, upholding mercy is always a pledge of delivering mercy. How is it therefore with you, are you deserted, is Christ gone; yet have you not had the upholding presence of God all this while? then be of good comfort, Christ is not so gone but he will return again.

If your case and condition be such that although you cannot find Christ, Christ is gone: though Christ be gone and departed from you and you cannot find him, yet if you can direct others to the finding of him when you cannot find him, then certainly he is not gone, but he will return again unto you. The spouse in the Canticles seeks after Christ: saith she, "He hath withdrawn himself and I cannot find him." (chap. v.) The daughters of Jerusalem say, "Whither is thy beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with thee? My beloved is gone down into his garden to the beds of spices." Mark, she could not find him herself, and yet she can direct others to the finding of him. What doth this signify, but plainly teach us thus much, that though Christ be gone, and we cannot find him, yet if we can direct others to the finding of him, he is not quite gone, but he will return again. Now is it thus with you, when Christ is gone, cannot you direct others to the finding of him? If you can, then build upon it, he is not so gone but he will return again.

But then, suppose that the Lord be departed from this nation much; we are under a very great displeasure of the Lord this day: God is departed from us, how shall we know now in the time of God's departure, that he will return again to this nation?

You know how it is with a man that doth leave his house: though he go away, yet if his children be there, and his goods be there, his plate and his jewels there, he will either come again to them, or send for them to himself. Believe it christians, God hath a very great cupboard of plate in this nation, Christ hath much plate in England, as much as in any nation in the world, and he will not lose his plate. There are three things very precious in the eyes of God, his truth, his worship, his children: such plate the Lord hath much of here, and he will not lose his plate, therefore he will return again.

Though he may afflict, and afflict sorely, yet he will return again.

God will never go while prayer stays. If there be a praying spirit, and a spirit of prayer be up in this nation, conclude that God is not quite gone, but he will return again.

You may know it by the providential pledges, that the Lord sends you. God was very much displeased with Jonah; you know, he threw him overboard into the sea; but then he appointed a whale to receive him, to give him entertainment: to provide a chamber of preservation, even in the belly of destruction. What did this signify? It signified thus much, that God would deliver him afterwards; this providence was a pledge for after deliverance. So David was hunted in the wilderness by Saul, but in the wilderness, God gave Saul into his hand. What did that signify? That present deliverance did signify to David, an after deliverance. Now though God be gone and greatly departed from us here: have you not many providential pledges of his love? What think you of the house that should have been blown up with fire lately? What doth it signify, but thus much, that God doth mind to restrain the remnant of their rage: How many pledges, providential pledges, have we had of God's return; therefore let us say: yet God will return again. But,

If your estate and condition be such, upon which the Lord will deliver for his name's sake, and with a notwithstanding; then why should you not conclude that God will return again: friends, there is a time when God will deliver his people, for his name's sake; and with a notwithstanding all their sins, and notwithstanding all his own displeasures; "Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake," Psalm. cvi. And when is that, that God will deliver a people for his name's sake and with a notwithstanding? Look into Psalm xlv., and you shall see when. Look, when a people do suffer for his name's sake, then God will deliver them for his name's sake. "Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercy sake." Why? at verse 22. "For thy sake we are killed all the day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Therefore, Lord, arise for thy name's sake. For thy sake are we killed. When a people suffer for God's name's sake, then God will deliver for his name's sake, then God will de-

liver with a notwithstanding. How is it with you now? You are in a suffering day, but are not all your sufferings for the name of Christ? Be of good comfort then, though God may be departed, and your city destroyed, yet he is not quite gone but will return again. But then,

Fifthly, What shall we do that God may return again? In answer, I will still carry it on in answer to both the cases.

If this question do relate unto your own particular souls; if you say, God is now gone from me, what shall I do that God may return to my soul again?

I answer briefly, Be sure of this, that you keep your door open, the door of your hearts open for Christ's return. When the master is abroad, the servant sits up to keep the door open for his coming in.

Be sure of this, that now in the time of Christ's absence, you neglect no duty, though very unsavoury to you. The more unsavoury the duty now is unto you through the absence of Christ, the more acceptable unto Christ.

Be sure that you go and stand there where Christ uses to be. And let me tell you this, if you cannot find him where he uses to be, you shall find him where he uses not to be, as you read in Cant. iii.

Then be sure of this, that you be not foolish with other lovers in the time of his absence, lest he hear thereof and come home no more.

Be sure of this also, that you do gather in upon Christ by all those words and by all those things whereby he seems to put you away from him. As the woman of Canaan, "True, Lord, but the dogs eat of the crumbs." Which made Christ turn in again, "Oh, woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt." But then,

Be sure that you send unto him one way or other, and tell him that you are sick of love unto his person. Then he returns. And,

Now say, Lord, though thou killest me, yet will I trust in thee. Friends, it was faith that brought Christ and your souls together at the first; and it must be faith that must bring Christ and your souls together after a desertion. Whatsoever therefore the displeasure of the Lord be upon you, say, Lord, though thou killest me I will trust in thee;

though I cannot see thee, yet I will trust in thee, and wait upon thee.

But then, suppose it be the case of the nation.

God is departed in a great measure, who doth not see it? What shall we therefore now do that God may return unto us again?

Friends, truly it is not an easy thing to bring God back again, when he is in a way of displeasure towards a people. The Lord was angry, and sorely displeased with Jonah; the mariners prayed, Jonah confessed his sin, and yet the storm ceased not, yet God goes on. I say it is not an easy thing to bring God back to a nation, when he is once in a way of displeasure against a people.

And sometimes the Lord will never return unto a people again. The case of the Gaderenes in the matter of their hogs. The whole city came unto Christ, and "besought him to be gone." And away he went, and we do not read that ever he came there again.

Sometimes he will return again, but with reserves of after-judgments. In Exod. xxxii., Moses prayed, and the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people, verse 14. But, saith he, verse 34: "Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them." Nevertheless; for all I thus repent me, and for all I do thus return unto them, nevertheless in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them. Sometimes, I say, he doth return with reserves of after-judgments, yet if you look into Deut. iii., the thing is expressed: "The Lord will judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left."

Well but then, what shall we do? It is too manifest, God is in a great measure gone from us, and departed from us, what shall we do now that God may return again unto this nation?

Be sure that you make your peace with Christ. Christ is this day offended, his gospel and institutions trampled upon. A prophet will the Lord your God raise up among you, hear ye him; if not, he will not pardon you; that is Christ. He that sins against the great remedy, shall be judged without remedy. Christ is the great remedy; it is a dangerous thing to sin against Christ. "O Jerusalem," saith

Christ, "how often would I have gathered you, and you would not be gathered; your house is left unto you desolate." And in Matt. xxii., you read that after that great invitation to the supper, those that were invited refused, they made light of it, went their ways; and the remnant took his servants, and intreated them spitefully, and slew them; but when the king heard thereof, he was wroth, and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city. It is a gospel quarrel. And therefore, I say, Is the Lord gone and departed from us? Oh, make your peace with Christ, it is Christ that is offended. Oh, make your peace with Christ, else never look the Father should return again. But then,

If you desire that God may return again unto you, then let us all return unto the Lord with all our hearts, Joel ii. 12, "Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: who knoweth if he will return, and repent, and leave a blessing behind him?" Who knows if you will turn unto him with all your heart, but he will return to you, and leave a blessing behind him?

But look into Hosea vi., "Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up; after two days will he revive us, in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." God will return.

Well, but what assurance have we of it; are we certain God will return? Yes, verse 3, "His going forth is prepared as the morning." As sure as a morning is after night, so sure will God return; his going forth is prepared as the morning; as certain he will return as the morning doth.

Aye, but when will God return?

In due season: "He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." That is, he will return in due season, his return of love shall be as the rain, as the former and the latter rain in their season. Would you now therefore that God should return to you, oh, now do you return unto God.

And that you may do so, only thus,

Be sure of this, that you pray and believe, believe and pray. Some pray, but do not believe; some say they believe,

but they do not pray. That which prayer cannot do, nothing can do; and that which faith will not do, prayer cannot do. The prayer of faith shall heal the sick; and who knows but it may heal a poor sick nation also. And therefore, I say, pray and believe, and believe and pray.

Be sure of this, that in all your addresses unto God in prayer, you come to the bottom in the matter of your confession. If you have days of fasting, and prayer, and humiliation, be sure that you come to the bottom in the matter of your confession, to confess the original sin of all the displeasure that is come upon us. Otherwise, though you fast, and pray, and confess, yet if you do not confess and bewail that sin which is the original of all our miseries, you do but cry lapwing cry, farthest off from the nest, and it will do us no good.

Be sure of this also, that you put away the evil of your doings, and do the contrary good; put away the evil of your doings, especially your *Ashtaroth*. Friends, though you fast and pray, and humble yourselves; if you do not reform, all your fasting and prayer will not bring God back again. All the days of fasting and prayer that you keep, will do nothing unless there be reformation. Yet I confess still, God must have a latitude, and he will sometimes save and deliver before we are prepared for it; but, I say, ordinarily, though you fast, and pray, and cry never so much, yet if you do not reform, all your prayers will not do. And though you do reform, yet if you do not reform and put away your *Ashtaroth*, that sin that hath brought this displeasure, your reformation will not do. And though you do thus also, yet if you do not do the contrary good, it will not serve. Look to that therefore.

Be sure of this, that you go out of yourselves, and lay down all your worldly interests at the feet of the Lord, saying, Come Lord, return, O Lord: not, Return, O my trade return; not, Return, O our ships return; not, Return, O our peace return: but, Return, O Lord, return, O Lord. Friends, the more you go out of yourselves, the more fit you are for God to return unto you.

And to conclude it, If you desire that God should return unto you, and that you may return to God, go then to God,

and pray, and say, Turn us, O Lord, and we shall be turned. And thus I have spoken to this case.

Yet there is one thing more. It is a tedious thing to lie under God's departure. There may be hopes that God may return again; but what shall we do in the interim till God returns again?

I will briefly speak to it, and have done.

If your question do relate unto your particular souls, and you say, God is now gone from my soul, what shall I do in the interim till God return again?

Be sure that you carry it as the afflicted spouse of Christ in the absence of your husband; and for that you may read at large in the book of the Canticles.

Be sure of this, that you maintain your interest, and let not the sense of your interest in God and Christ be dissolved. Return, O Lord, how long! and let it repent thee concerning thy servants. Still they keep their interest, thy servants still. And so the spouse, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine."

Be sure of this, that you never come to say, God will never return again; though you say, Lord, how long? yet never say, God is gone, and will return no more. Poor, drooping, afflicted, and deserted soul, be sure of this, that you never say, God will never return; lo, he cometh leaping over the mountains, over difficulties to you; only be you willing to go leaping over the mountains of difficulties for to meet with him.

And if your question do concern the public or the nation, what shall we do till God do return again?

I answer, Then go and lament after God. Is God gone, and is God departed in a great measure from this nation? now go and lament after God. Twenty years, when the ark was taken, the children of Israel lamented after God in the ark. How long, how long God may stay at a distance from us, God only knows; in the interim let us all now go and lament after God. And

Be sure that you keep his ambassadors with you. When he calls home his ambassadors, he proclaims war against a nation; but so long as he hath any agents among you, he is not quite gone. And

If ever God begins to return to us again, be thankful for

the beginnings of his return. He that is thankful for little, shall have much; and he that is thankful for the beginnings of return, shall have a whole return. Thus do then, and who knows but that the Lord may yet return, and leave a blessing behind him? That he may do so, let us now pray, and say with the Psalmist, "Return O Lord, how long, and let it repent thee concerning thy servants."

SERMON X.

PREVENTING MERCY.

"For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness.

"Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips. Selah. For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness."—PSALM XXI. 2, 3.

THIS psalm is a psalm of thanksgiving, wherein the psalmist doth profess, that he will joy in the Lord, verse 1., "The king shall joy in thy strength, O Lord, and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice." Why so? because that the Lord had heard and granted his petition, "Thou hast not withholden the request of his lips," verse 2. Yea, more than so, "Thou hast given him his heart's desire," verse 2., yea, more than so, thou hast given him more than he asked, for "he asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever," verse 4. Yet more than so, thou hast not only given him his heart's desire, an answer to his prayer, and more than he prayed for, but "thou hast prevented him with the blessings of goodness." As if he should say, Lord, I never asked a kingdom, I never thought of a kingdom, but thou hast prevented me with the blessings of thy goodness, and thou hast set "a crown of pure gold on my head;" blessings of goodness, in the Hebrew, is put for good blessings, wherewith the Lord doth anticipate the psalmist; for thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness; in the consideration of which preventing love and grace, his heart was much warmed, and affected.

From whence then I take up this note or doctrine.