

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.

That it is a sweet thing, and worthy of all our thankful acknowledgments to be prevented with the blessings of God's goodness, or God's good blessings.

Preventing mercy is sweet mercy, soul refreshing mercy, which a thankful gracious heart doth well observe, and in the observation thereof is much refreshed therewithal.

For the opening and prosecution of which argument,

First, I shall labour to shew that it is no new thing for God to walk in the way of preventing mercy with the children of men.

Secondly, How and in what respects God will prevent us with his mercies, or his blessings.

Thirdly, What those choice blessings are, wherewith God will prevent the children of men.

Fourthly, Why God will carry on the work of his mercy in a way of preventing love.

Fifthly, What there is in this preventing love, that should be so sweet and soul refreshing to a thankful gracious heart. And

Sixthly, In case that God hath prevented any of us with his love or mercy, what is our duty that doth flow from thence.

First, It is no new thing for God to walk in a way of preventing love and mercy with the children of men. Thus he hath always dealt, doth deal, and will deal so; thus he hath always dealt, so with the world, so with the nations of the world, so with great towns and places, so with families, and so with particular souls.

As for the world; did not God first come with his mercy to the world, before the world made after it? "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." But how did he give this gift? Did we beg it first, did we seek it first, or did he first prevent us with it? When Adam, and all the world in Adam had sinned, fallen, did Adam and the world first go to God for Christ, or for the promise of Christ; or did God first give out the promise of Christ, before Adam or the world sought it? "The seed of the woman shall break the serpent's head;" God first gave out this promise of Christ, before Adam or the world sought it. Thus in regard of the world.

And as he hath dealt thus with the world in regard of pre-

venting mercy, so with the nations of the world: with the nation of the Jews; so in Ezek xvi., "When thou layedst in thy blood, and no eye pitied thee, I passed by thee, and said unto thee, live." So when the nation of the Jews shall yet be converted again: "He is found of those that seek him not:" it is spoken of the calling of the Jews. And as for the nations of the gentiles, says our Saviour Christ to his disciples, "Go, teach all nations." Did the nations of the gentiles come to Christ, and say, Lord, the nation of the Jews have rejected thee, now then let the gospel come to us, and we will receive it? No, but says the Saviour Christ, "Go, teach all nations," whatever they be, rich or poor, high or low, whatever they be, "Go, teach all nations, and I will be with you," for their conversion, for their salvation, to the end of the world. Thus in regard of nations.

So, also, in regard of towns, great towns, places, corporations. What worse town than that of Capernaum which afterward was exalted to heaven? But did Capernaum first come to Christ, or did Christ first go to Capernaum? Christ first went to them. Matt. iv. Ye read of several towns in the Acts of the Apostles that did receive the gospel by the hands of the apostles, Iconium, Derbe, Lystra; but did these towns first seek to the apostles, and say, Pray come and preach Christ to us; or did the apostles first go to them? The apostles first went with commission from God to them. Thus in regard of towns.

And as God dealt thus with towns, preventing towns and corporations with the means of grace, when they never thought on it, so in regard of families. Who doth not know how God by his mercy did prevent the family of the jailor, converting that family by his preventing love? Who doth not know how God dealt by Zaccheus and his family: Zaccheus got up the tree, may be in curiosity, among the multitude to see Christ go by; but Christ seeing him, invites himself to his house: "Come down, Zaccheus, for to day I must abide at thy house." Did Zaccheus first invite Christ, or did Christ first invite himself? Christ first invited himself. Thus in regard of families.

And as for particular souls, you know how it was with Matthew the publican, sitting at the receipt of custom; Come and follow me, says Christ; preventing of him. And

you know how it was with Paul; "I was a blasphemer, and I was a persecutor, but I obtained mercy." How so? Did he seek it first? No, says he, I went breathing out threatenings against the people of God, and God met me, and unhorsed me; God prevented me with his grace and mercy. Thus Paul. And pray tell me what do you think of that whole chapter of Luke, the xvth? There are three parables: the parable of the lost groat, of the lost sheep, and of the lost son. The woman lost her groat, and swept to find it; but did the groat make first towards the woman or the woman make after the groat first? The shepherd lost his sheep, but did the sheep make first after the shepherd or the shepherd after the sheep? Indeed it is said concerning the lost son that he first takes up a resolution, "I will return home to my father;" but when his father saw him afar off, he ran and met him and embraced him and welcomed him home. Why? But to shew that the work of grace and mercy shall be all along carried on in a way of preventing love. Thus it was with the world from the beginning, thus with the nations of the Jews and gentiles, thus with great towns and corporations, thus with whole families, and thus with particular souls. It is no new thing, therefore, for God to walk in a way of preventing love towards the children of men. That is the first.

Secondly. Well but, then, how and in what respects will God prevent us with his mercies, or with his good blessings?

He will prevent us with his mercies in reference to our own deservings; when we deserve evil we shall receive good. Is it not a great prevention when a man shall deserve evil, to receive good? Thus will God deal with men sometimes: "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." Did not Moses deserve a sharp chiding and to be beaten out of his excuses, when God sent him upon his work, and he stood excusing the matter so long? Exod. iv. "He said, Oh, my Lord, send I pray thee by the hand of him whom thou wilt send: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses." What was the issue of it? Instead of blows, mercy; instead of chiding and threatening, a promise. "And he said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well, and lo, behold he cometh forth to meet thee, and when he seeth thee he will be glad in his heart; and thou shalt speak unto him, and put

words in his mouth, and I will be with thy mouth and with his mouth, and will teach ye what ye shall do." Here is good in the stead of evil. Thus God prevents us with his mercies in reference to our own deservings.

As God doth prevent us thus in reference to our own deservings, so he doth prevent us also in reference to his own proceedings of common providence. Look when God doth give in a mercy that is beyond the reach of the second cause, that is stronger or greater than the root of the second cause will bear, or beyond common providence, then God is said to prevent us with his mercy. Now thus God doth many times give in a mercy that the root of the second cause cannot bear. So he gave Elizabeth a child and Sarah a child when they were old. "With this staff came I over this brook (says Jacob), and lo I am become two bands." And thus Israel said, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father, (Deut. xxvi. 5,) and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty and populous." A Syrian ready to perish was my father. As if a man should say, I came here to London, poor, having but my pen and inkhorn by my side, and now I am risen up to a great estate, beyond all my own parts, wits and endeavours, for the Lord hath prevented me with the blessings of his goodness. Thus God doth sometimes prevent us with his mercy in reference to his own proceedings of common providence, or the course of nature.

And then, again, as the Lord doth thus prevent us with his mercy in reference to his own proceedings of common providence, so he doth prevent us with his mercy in reference to our own preparedness. Look when God doth give in a mercy that we are not prepared for, then God is said to prevent us with his mercy. Now was it not a great and choice mercy for the ark to be brought home again to Israel? Yet, notwithstanding, you shall find they were not prepared for it; before they were prepared God gave them in the mercy: the ark came back, 1 Sam. vi., but their preparation you read of in the viith chapter: "And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, If you do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods, and Ashtaroht; and the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroht and served the Lord only." This was after the ark come home;

so then the ark returned before they were thus prepared. And you know what is said in the lviith of Isaiah: "For the iniquity of his covetousness I was wroth and smote him, I hid me and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." What then? Verse 18, "I have seen his ways and will heal him; I will lead him, also, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners;" over and beyond all preparations, for he went on frowardly in the way of his heart, and he was not prepared; but notwithstanding his want of preparation, I have seen his ways and will heal him, and will restore comforts to him and to his mourners. Thus God doth sometimes prevent us with his mercy in reference to our own preparedness for his mercy.

As God doth prevent us with his mercy, in reference to our preparedness for his mercy; so he doth prevent us with his mercy, in reference to all our prayers. Look when God gives in a mercy before we pray for it, then God is truly said to prevent us with his mercy. It is ordinarily said, God will not set in his mercy before our oven be hot; but if God should never set in his mercy, until our oven and hearts be hot in prayer, we had been an unredeemed people to this day. Though God will answer prayer, yet he will be found also of them that seek him not. Do ye say, Why then should we pray? I answer, that you are to pray, not only because it is your duty to pray, but, the more God works in an extraordinary way, the more it is our duty to be found in the use of ordinary means. And what if I say, that the same mercy may come as an answer to prayer, and yet in a way of preventing love too? What say you to the case of Hezekiah? When he was sick he prayed, and God heard his prayer, and health came as an answer of prayer; and yet he was prevented, for fifteen years more God gave in to him, which was beyond his prayer. You know how it was with Zacharias; says the Lord, "I have heard thy prayer," and gave him a child, yet he did not pray for a child, for he could not believe that he should have a child; so that God gave him a child in a way of preventing mercy, and yet it was in answer of prayer too. So here in the text: "Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips, for thou hast prevented him with the blessings of thy goodness." Why? Why although the mercy received may

be an answer of prayer in regard of the body of it, yet it may come in a way of preventing love as to the moreness of it. So it was with David, so with Hezekiah, and so with Zacharias. Thus God doth sometimes prevent, as in reference to our prayer, giving in mercy beyond all our prayers.

And then, as God doth prevent us in reference to our prayers, so in reference to our believing thoughts or expectancies. "When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dreamed." Why were we as them that dreamed? Why truly we never looked for it, nor expected it, we did not think on it, it was beyond all our expectations. Thus God doth prevent us sometimes in reference to our expectancies, to our faith, and to our thoughts.

As he thus prevents us with his mercy in reference to our thoughts, and faith, and expectance, so in reference to his own promises and the conditions thereof. If I promise a man a kindness upon a condition, and do that kindness for him when he hath not performed the condition, then I prevent him with kindness. Now the Lord hath promised many a mercy upon a condition, and yet given the mercy when we have not performed the condition: "I said (says David) I would confess my sin, and thou, Lord, forgavest my iniquity." Lord, thou hast made a promise of forgiveness, upon condition of our confession and humiliation; I did not go so far, I did but say, I would confess my sin, and thou preventedst me with thy forgiving love. Thus now you see, how and in what respects God doth prevent us with his mercy. He doth prevent us with his mercy in reference to our deservings, in reference to his own proceedings of common providence, in reference to all our prayers, in reference to our faith and expectance, in reference to our preparedness, and in reference to his own promises and the conditions thereof. That is the second.

Thirdly, Well but then, what are those choice blessings wherewith God will prevent his people?

What not? But the greater the blessing is, the more it is steeped in preventing love. There are outward blessings and there are inward blessings; there are temporal blessings and there are eternal blessings. Now though the preventing love of God doth shine forth in all, yet the greater the blessing

or the mercy is, the more it is irradiated with the beams of preventing love.

Will ye instance ?

Will ye instance in the great matter of our redemption ? What greater mercy or blessing, than our redemption in and by Jesus Christ ? that is of grace : “ In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of his grace.” And when Christ came into the world, in reference to our redemption to take our nature upon him ; do but see what a pack of wicked men were then extant upon the ground, in Luke iii. 1, “ Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, (there is one,) Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, (there is another,) and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, (there is another,) and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea, Annas and Caiaphas being high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.” And why was Christ born in such a time as this, and among such company ? but all to shew that the work of our redemption was to be carried on in a way of preventing love.

Or will ye instance in the matter of our conversion ? What greater mercy or blessing than our conversion ? Yet look into Job xxxiii., and you shall see how that mercy comes swimming down the stream of preventing love. “ God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not.” What then ? “ In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed, then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction.”

Or will ye instance in the matter of our justification ? What greater mercy or blessing than that of our justification ? Yet this also comes swimming down the stream of preventing love, for “ he justifies the ungodly.” And in Rom. iv. it is said of Abraham, that he was justified not yet circumcised, for we say, “ that faith was reckoned to him for righteousness,” verse 9. How was it then reckoned, when he was in circumcision or in uncircumcision ; not in circumcision but in uncircumcision ? Why, why not in circumcision, but in his uncircumcision ? but to shew that this mercy of justification must be carried on in a way of preventing love.

Or will ye instance in the matter of our sanctification ? What greater mercy than to be truly sanctified ? Yet this

also comes swimming down the stream of preventing love. "I will wash ye with clean water." "Such and such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified in the name of the Lord." This also in a way of preventing love.

Will ye instance in the matter of consolation? What greater mercy than for a poor drooping soul to be truly comforted? This also comes in a way of preventing love. "Or ever I was aware," before I was aware, saith the spouse, "my soul was as the chariots of Amminadib." I was unwilling to receive the promise, my soul refused to be comforted; but, "Or ever I was aware, my soul was as the chariots of a willing people," of Amminadib, that is, of a willing people. When Christ was dead, how sad was Mary; Christ did but come unto her, and say, Mary, and she was comforted.

Will ye instance in the revelation of the truths of the times? What greater blessing than for a man to be well acquainted with the truth of the times, in opposition to anti-christ? Now says John in Rev. i., when these truths were given out, "I heard a voice behind me;" before I was aware, God prevented me, acquainting me with these truths of the Revelations.

Or will ye instance in outward blessings or mercies? Then I will appeal to you, in the great turnings of your lives, hath not God prevented you with his blessings? It is true we are to trade in a way of prayer to gain outward blessings and mercies; but, I say, when ever did you meet with any great turn of your life, but it was cast by preventing love before prayer came in? So that do ye ask, what are those choice blessings wherewith God will prevent his people? you see here what they are. So I have done with the third thing.

Fourthly, Now why will God carry on the work of his mercy in a way of preventing love?

Because the heart of God is full of love to the children of men. Ordinary love will shew kindness upon kindness; but when the heart is full of love, it delights to prevent the person loved with kindness. Now the heart of God is full of love for the children of men.

God will so carry on the work of his grace and mercy, that all his mercies and blessings now may be conformed to the womb that bare them. The child follows the womb that bare it; the first in every kind is the rule of the rest.

Now election is the womb of all our mercies ; and doth not preventing love sway there ? “I have loved Jacob, and hated Esau,” before they had done either good or evil ; there is preventing love. Now I say, God will so carry on the work of his mercy, that all his mercies and blessings may be conformed to their first original election, and there preventing mercy is very sweet.

But God will so carry on the work of his mercy, as it may be most taking and effective upon the souls of the children of men ; and what is more taking than preventing love ? What more operative, what more powerful, what more taking I say ? You know the parable ; some were invited to the supper, and some not invited ; some came and some came not ; who were those that came ? who were those that came not ? those that came not were such as were invited ; those that came were such as were in the lanes, highways, and hedges, compelled to come in. Aye, preventing love is the most taking ; now God will so carry on the work of his mercy, as it may be most taking, and most effective upon the souls of the children of men.

Again, God will so carry on his mercy, as that it may be holding and sure. The more any mercy is laid upon that which is in God himself, and the less laid upon that which is in us, the more holding and sure it is. Now mercy laid upon grace is sure, and therefore God will carry on the work of his mercy in a way of preventing love, that his mercy may be sure, that it may be holding.

Again, God will so carry on the work of his mercy, as that it may be most engaging, and most obliging with the hearts of men. What is there in all the world that is more engaging to an ingenuous spirit than grace ? And what is there more gracious than preventing love ? Thereby a soul is engaged to God. Aye, says a poor soul, I was going on in the way of my sin, lay snorting in my sin, and never thought on the good ways of God, unless it were to oppose them, and speak against them ; but then, before I was aware, I know not how, God did reveal himself and his ways to me ; oh, now what shall I do for God ? I will spend and be spent for God ; “anything for Christ,” who hath thus overcome me with his preventing love. Of all those that are called the ancients, Austin did most magnify the grace of

God ; Bradwardine called him the son of grace ; and of all in those days, none that we read of tasted so much of the preventing mercy of God as he. When he was young he prayed for the mortification of his sin, and yet he confesses that he secretly desired that God would not grant his prayer, yet God prevented his prayer. Another time being alone, he heard a voice saying, *Tolle lege, tolle lege*, take and read, take and read ; and he opened the bible, and pitched upon some words in the first of John, that proved the beginning of his conversion. Another time going a journey, he misses his way, and missing his way he escaped his enemies that lay in the way for him ; several times God prevented him, insomuch that he brake out into this expression : Lord, I did not first come to thee, but thou didst first come and stir me up to come unto thee. And who ever magnified the freeness of the riches of the grace of God like Paul ? And why ? Of all the men in the world, he lay under the greatest preventions of divine love ; no wonder therefore Paul of all men magnified the free grace of God, for he of all other lay under the preventions of divine love.

Again further, God will so carry on the work of his grace and mercy, that no flesh may glory in itself, that we may not rest upon any thing that we do, or have, or suffer. When we are to come to duty, we are unwilling to it ; after we have performed it, we are as apt to rest upon it, as before we were unwilling to come unto it. What is the reason ? but because men think that they do come to God before God comes to them ; but let a man be once fully convinced of God's preventing love, and he rests no more upon what he doth, but says he then, If God hath prevented me in reference to my prayer, why should I rest on my prayer, if God hath prevented me in reference to my duty, why should I rest on my duty ; says Paul to the Corinthians, " He calleth things that are not, that no flesh may glory in his sight ;" And in Job xxxiii., says Elihu there, " In deep sleep, in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed, then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction ;" why ? " That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man." There is no such way in the world to take down the pride of man, to keep him from resting upon duty, as to be

well seen, well experienced, in the preventing love of God. And therefore God carries on the work of his grace and mercy in a way of preventing love, that no flesh may glory in itself.

God will so carry on the work of his mercy, and goodness, and of his grace, that men may be made most gracious, and in case they sin against him, they may be reduced to true repentance. What is there in all the world will make one so gracious as a sight of grace? And what gives one a greater sight of grace than preventing love? And what is there in all the world that will reduce a soul to true repentance, having sinned, like preventing love? It is said of Peter, "He went out and wept bitterly;" all his tears came out of the eyes of preventing grace; Christ looked upon him first, it was preventing love that brought forth that repentance. I say, no such way to reduce a poor soul that hath sinned to true repentance, as the consideration of God's preventing love. Do you therefore ask why God is pleased to carry on his mercy thus, in a way of preventing love? For these six or seven reasons. And so you have the fourth thing.

Fifthly, Well but then in the fifth place, What is there in this preventing love that is so sweet to a gracious soul, to a thankful heart?

The more immediately that any mercy doth come out of God's hand, and the less it runs through ours, the more sweet it is. Water is sweetest out of the fountain. Now preventing mercy comes immediately out of the hands of God, and runs not through our hand at all, nor through the hand of the second cause at all, therefore must needs be very sweet.

But the more costless, or less costly to us any mercy is, the sweeter it is. Possibly a kindness may cost more to keep it than it is worth. Suppose a man promise me or give me wood; the cutting down of the wood, and bringing it home, may cost me more than the wood is worth. So a kindness may cost one more care than the thing itself doth amount unto. But now preventing mercy cost me nothing, it is cut down to my hand, it is brought into my hand, it is costless mercy, it cost me nothing, surely therefore it is very sweet.

But then again, the more perfect, and complete, and

entire any mercy is, the sweeter it is. Half-mercies are not so sweet as whole. Preventing mercy is complete and entire. In Ezek. xvi. you may see what a complete mercy is there given: "I washed thee with water (verse 9) I thoroughly washed away thy blood, and I anointed thee with ointment, I clothed thee also with brodered work, and shod thee with badger's skin; and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk; I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thine hands, and a chain on thy neck, and I put a jewel on thy forehead, and ear-rings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head;" and so he goes on. What mercy was this? It was preventing mercy. "I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thy own blood, and said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, live, yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, live." So then, preventing mercy is the most complete mercy; and it must needs be so, for it comes immediately out of God's hand, and not through the hand of the second cause. That that comes immediately out of God's hand, not running through the hand of the second cause, is most complete. Upon this account our justification is more perfect and complete than our sanctification, because it comes immediately out of the hand of God, and not out of our own hand. In justification our *guilt* is removed, in sanctification our *filth* is removed; our guilt is offensive to ourselves, our filth is offensive to God. Now one would think, God would rather take away all our filth that is offensive to himself, than all our guilt that is offensive to us; no, but our justification is perfect, our sanctification not perfect; why? because our justification comes immediately out of the hand of God, and doth not run through our own hand; for though we be justified by our faith, yet it is as faith is God's instrument, not as our act. Now the more immediately that any mercy comes out of the hand of God, and the less out of our hand, the more perfect and complete it is. So doth preventing mercy do, and therefore must needs be very sweet.

Again, The more that any mercy doth correct difficulty and sweeten duty, the sweeter is that mercy. Now preventing love doth correct difficulty, and it doth sweeten duty. See it in Zaccheus; what an hard and great work was he upon! "Lord," says he, "the half of my goods I give to

the poor." Stay then : suppose his estate was a thousand pounds, he would have but five hundred pounds left ; and " Lord," says he, " if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." Suppose he had wronged men to the value of a hundred pounds, there is four hundred pounds more gone, so there is but a hundred pounds left of a thousand. What an hard work is this ! Yet mark how easily he comes off to this hard work, " Behold Lord ;" why he had drunk deep of preventing love. " Zaccheus, come down," says Christ, " for to day I must abide at thine house." Christ doth not come and say, Zaccheus, give half thy goods to the poor, and if thou hast wronged any man, restore him fourfold, and then I will come to thy house ; no, but : " Zaccheus, come down, for this day I must abide at thy house," preventing him with his love, and then this hard work comes off easily. There is nothing will correct difficulty and sweeten duty more than preventing love, therefore preventing love must needs be sweet. And thus now you see what there is in preventing love, that is so sweet to a gracious soul. That is the fifth.

Sixthly, But now lastly. You will say, Suppose I have tasted of preventing love and mercy, suppose I have had experience of it, for I must needs say, this is my case ; for I was going on in the way of my sin, and God prevented me many a time with his preventing grace. I have been backward *to*, and dull *in* duty, and God hath many a time prevented me with assisting grace. I have been full of unbelief, and said : I am cast off, and shall never see the face of God again, but the Lord hath prevented me with his comforting grace, and with the shines of his face. I was galloping to hell as fast as I could, but God hath prevented me with his saving grace. And as for my outward estate in the world, I was low and knew not what to do, and God prevented me with such a gift, such a house and land ; what hath my life been but a bundle of preventing mercy ; if any have drunk deep of this preventing grace, I may say, I have much more. Now what is my duty that doth flow from hence ?

If you have tasted of God's preventing love and mercy, if God hath indeed prevented you with the " blessings of his goodness," why then should not your hearts be filled with

the sense thereof; why should not your thoughts be much thereupon? How God hath prevented you at such a time, in such a thing. The more sense you have of God's preventing love and mercy, the more humbly you will walk with God, and the more closely, especially considering that God will not upbraid you. If a man takes a beggar from the dunghill, and makes her his wife, prevents her with his love and kindness, the sense of his preventing love, will make her walk humbly all her days, unless the man upbraid her with it; if he upbraids her with it, it will not make her walk humbly; but unless he upbraids her with it, the sense of it will make her walk humbly all her days. Friends, God doth prevent us with his love, and will not upbraid us with his preventions; and therefore why should we not walk humbly, and why should we not think much thereon, and have our hearts filled with the sense thereof. The more necessary and useful any mercy is, the more we are engaged to think thereon. Some mercies are more necessary, and some less necessary. Those mercies and blessings we put God upon the giving of with our own desires, we may suspect are less necessary; but those that God gives us in a way of preventing love, we may think them most necessary. This is the way of preventing love, surely therefore we are engaged to think much thereon; thus ye become God's darlings by his preventing love. The world hath its darlings; such a one lies long in bed, takes little pains, yet the world flows in upon him, the world prevents him, he is the world's darling; another man is up early and late, takes a great deal of pains, and yet is poor; but here is a man do what he will, yet he grows rich, for he is the world's darling. So now you have blessing upon blessing, and in a way of prevention, what doth this argue, but that you are God's darlings? And will you not think much of this? Oh, think much thereon.

If you have tasted of this preventing love and mercy, go away and be very thankful to God upon this account. Shall David be thankful to the Lord for preventing him, taking him from the sheep-fold, and will not you be thankful for preventing mercy? Shall Ruth be thankful to Boaz for preventing her with his kindness, spreading his skirt over her, and will not you be thankful to the Lord for his preventing love to you? Why should ye not all say with

David here: "He hath prevented me with the blessings of his goodness." Indeed I was a great sinner, but he hath prevented me with his justifying mercy; and I was a wandering creature, as a lost sheep, but he hath prevented me with his redeeming mercy; God spake once, and twice unto me, and I heard it not, but in the deep sleep of my soul, then did he open mine ears, and seal instruction on me before I was aware; therefore all that is within me bless the Lord. Oh, you that are thus prevented, bless the Lord for this his preventing mercy, his sweet mercy.

But if you have tasted of God's preventing mercy, and have indeed been prevented with the blessings of his goodness, even your very prayers have been prevented with the blessings of his goodness; why then should ye not be early up, and sooner at your prayers, that if it may be, you may prevent God's mercy with your prayers, as God hath prevented your prayers with his mercy. When a master comes into the chamber where his servant lies, and finds him in bed, what says the servant if he be ingenuous? This my master's coming into my bed-chamber before I was up, is a plain rebuke to my sloth, I will be up the sooner hereafter. So says a gracious, ingenuous soul, God's preventing my prayer with his mercy, is a plain rebuke to my prayer; wherefore awake prayer, up prayer, through the grace of God I will never be so tardy again with my prayer and duty, but as God hath prevented my prayer with his mercy, so through grace I will prevent his mercy with my prayer for the time to come.

If you have tasted of God's preventing mercy, and God hath indeed prevented you with the blessings of his goodness, why then should ye not all labour to be like unto God in your dealings with men, preventing them with your loving kindness. You think it a great matter to forgive a man that hath injured you upon acknowledging of his fault, but God prevents us with his forgiveness before we acknowledge and be humbled; therefore why should you not labour to be like to God therein? If a man hath done you a wrong or injury, do not stand upon it to have his acknowledgment, but say, I will be like to God; God prevents me with his love before my acknowledgment, therefore through grace I will prevent this man with my kindness before his acknowledgment, I will

forgive him. Thus labour to be like unto God in all your dealings with men.

But, If you have tasted of this preventing love, and God hath indeed prevented you with the blessings of his goodness, why, then, why should ye not trust in the Lord for ever? Whatsoever your condition be, trust in the Lord, and believe for ever now, for your souls, for your bodies. Some there are that doubt of their salvation, of the salvation of their souls. Ah, says one, I am afraid I shall not be saved because my prayer cannot be accepted. But will the Lord be found of those that seek him not, and will he not be found of you that seek him, though your prayers are poor prayers? Ah, says another, I am afraid the Lord will not receive me when I come to him, he will not receive me. No; but if the Lord comes to us first, and makes a tender and offer of his grace to us; if he seeks us, will he not receive them, think you, that seek him? Surely he will. Some there are that doubt in reference to their outward condition, and say they shall want provision, shall want estates to maintain them; but hath the Lord prevented you with his mercy in the great turns of your life, why, then, should you not trust in the Lord though you see no means at all how you should be supplied? Heretofore God hath prevented you with his mercies; and why should you not say, God hath prevented me heretofore, therefore now I will trust in him though I see no means of supply? Whatsoever your condition be, trust in the Lord now upon this account; believe, believe. Let me say this to you, Would you believe? Do you desire to believe? Yes, I desire to believe. Do ye? then let your eye be fixed on God's preventing love. What is the reason that men do not believe? but because their eyes are fixed no more steadily upon preventing love. The more you know God is willing to help you, the more you will believe; I believe that, you will say. Now I pray then, tell me, suppose a man comes to a beggar, and before the beggar asks, the man gives him money; will not the beggar conclude that the man was willing to relieve him? Yes. Thus now it is, we beg and we beg, but it is as no begging, then comes the Lord and prevents us with his mercy; will you not say the Lord is willing to shew mercy? surely he is. Now, therefore, seeing God is thus willing to shew mercy, oh, then, believe; you that have gone

doubting and fearing and trembling all your days, for shame now believe. Have you tasted of God's preventing mercy time after time, in the matter of your justification, in the matter of your sanctification, in the matter of your consolation, and in reference to our outward concernments? Oh, trust in the Lord for ever upon this account, and magnify the riches of his grace. Now go away, and say, through free grace, I will doubt no more. Upon all occasions trust in the Lord, O you that have been made partakers of preventing mercy.