

who am a merciful man. For my part, saith the soul of a merciful man, I bless God my estate is comfortable; I want nothing, I have everything about me my heart can desire, but the saints about me are in misery. Oh that I could help them that are in misery! Men are made sensible by them that are in misery. A saint's mercy is drawn forth by the miseries of others that are about him.

But you will say, The papists and the heathens they are merciful men, they are pitiful. But what difference is there then between the mercy of a man truly gracious and the mercy of others?

Therefore you may remember in the description of mercy in the general I told you that it was a grace of God's Spirit, whereby the mercy of a man is drawn forth to them that are in misery.

SERMON XXII.

OR,

THE SEVERAL WORKINGS OF MERCY IN THE HEART.

'Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.'—MAT. V. 7.

THE work we have now to do is to shew you,

First, The several workings of mercy in the heart.

Secondly, The motives unto it.

Thirdly, The object of mercy.

Fourthly, The gracious manner of the work of mercy. And then we shall come to this promise that is here made to them that are merciful, that they shall obtain mercy.

For the several workings of mercy in the heart, they are these:—

The first act of mercy upon the taking notice of the miseries of others, it grieves for them; there is a compassion towards those that are in misery. A merciful man will not slight the miseries of others, much less will he despise them, or condemn others that are in misery. A merciful man doth not think the miseries of others not at all to concern him, but he looks upon them as concerning himself; he is grieved, his heart is touched with the miseries of others.

Secondly, From these there is a working desire in his soul to relieve them. Oh that I could tell how to relieve and help souls as I see to be any way in misery, bodily misery, or spiritual misery!

Thirdly, The heart is solicitously careful about ways of help; not only wishes and desires to help, but the thoughts of the mind are very solicitous what way I may compass to be helpful to those that are in misery. You have an excellent scripture for that in Prov. xiv. 22, 'Mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good.' Here is the merciful man described, and the promise of mercy to him; he is one that deviseth good. A merciful man looks upon

others in misery, casts about him in his thoughts when he lies upon his bed, and is devising how he may do good. I am here lying quietly in my bed; I am warm, others are in misery; how may I be any ways useful to them, to do them any good? He doth devise good: and in Isa. xxxii. 8, 'The liberal deviseth liberal things.' A merciful man is not only liberal and helpful when you put him upon occasion, when you come to him, when he cannot for shame, but he must give you something. No; but he himself deviseth liberal things; he plots with himself what he may do to be instrumental for the good of those that are in a sad conditional. A covetous man doth not more devise how he might gain to himself to get a good bargain, than a merciful man devises how he may distribute, how he may do good. That is the third act of mercy, it is solicitously careful.

Fourthly, A timely improvement. He doth not keep his mercy in his own thoughts, but he doth improve what he hath for the good of others that are in misery, if he hath an estate, parts, friends, strength of body; or if he be poor and mean, and hath nothing else, then his prayers, all that he hath, shall be some way or other improved for the help of such as are in misery. A merciful man doth not think that God hath given him any good thing merely for himself, but for improvement. I was not born for myself, I have not an estate for myself, neither have I parts of nature or grace for myself, but I have them for to be of public good as much as may be. That is the fourth thing, a careful improvement.

Fifthly, The act of mercy is to be willing to part with much for others. Improve it I may for their

good, or lend them, but part with it I will not; but mercy will part with anything that it hath. It is my own. But how is it my own? it is my own as a steward, and not to be used as I please; therefore if I see that the Lord hath need of it, or my brother hath need, that God may have glory, and good may be done, I am as willing to part with it as ever I was to receive it.

Sixthly, If any hath offended he is ready to pardon, full of pity that way. Therein men of mean estates may be merciful as well as others, though I see miseries in others that hath need of me; though I see they are unthankful, they are unworthy, yet mercy passes by unworthiness and wrongs.

Seventhly, It keeps back justice for a time. Though it will not hinder justice, but that it shall have her glory in time, yet mercy may cause a forbearance of the stroke of justice, when justice is ready to strike the stroke; mercy comes in, as the mercy of God, when justice is striking the stroke, it comes in and pleads, Lord spare, spare yet a little while! As when Abraham was lifting up the knife to cut the throat of Isaac, the angel cries from heaven, Abraham, stay thy hand! As the mercy of God doth, so the mercy of man forbears justice, and will not have justice in the rigour and full extent of it to be executed; it causes to forbear a while, to see whether there may not something be done wherein the offender may be spared and justice not wronged, and it will moderate the work of justice as much as it can.

Eighthly and lastly, Mercy will cause one to put oneself into the same condition as those are in that are in misery. Whether it be in regard of poverty or pain, or what kind soever it be, mercy causes one to put himself into the same state, to be in bonds with those that are in bonds, and to weep with those that weep. It is true I am in this comfortable condition myself, and have abundance of choice enjoyments, but what are all these to me so long as others suffer hard things? What if I were in bonds with them, and if I were spoiled of all that I have as they are—and if God had put me into the same condition that they are, how should I be affected? And as I would have others to pity me if I were in the like condition, so I labour in my heart to pity them. Here is a merciful man, a merciful woman. These are the several workings of the bowels of mercy.

Secondly, Mercy, when it is a work of the grace of God, and not merely some natural work, as may be in natural men, there mercy arises upon gracious motives; when the heart works in ways of mercy graciously, it hath gracious motives to raise up this working, and to maintain these workings of mercy.

First, The soul looks upon God as the God of mercy, and looks upon the excellency of mercy in God himself. Oh mercy, it is lively in God! the bowels

of God's compassion yearns towards his creatures in misery; and therefore, if I be a child of God, why should it not yearn in me too? why should there not be a likeness in me to the God that I profess to be my Father?

Secondly, I myself have need of mercy every day. I live upon mercy; it is mercy that maintains me; it is mercy that keeps me out of hell; it is mercy that provides for me; and if I have such need of mercy, and live upon it, then why should not I be merciful towards others?

Thirdly, I have not only need of it, but I have received mercy. The Lord hath been merciful to me, merciful to my body, merciful to my soul. I have had preventing mercy, delivering mercy, healing mercy, comforting mercy, saving mercies; mercies of all sorts when I was in miseries. I have cried, the Lord pitied me, and hath helped me. Now, I that have received so much mercy, it is infinitely equal that I should be merciful towards my brethren.

Fourthly, When the mercy of God comes from grace, it comes from a sight of the mercy of God in Christ; not only that God is merciful, and hath been merciful to me in a way of common providence, but I look upon the mercy of God in Christ, the tender mercies of God in Christ. A man in a natural way may come to see and know that God is merciful; but when I am merciful from a sight of God's mercy to me in Jesus Christ, and therefore I shew mercy to others, this is right mercy. In Christ the beams of God's mercy are concentrated as in a burning-glass; they are all concentrated together in one; and when they shine through Christ to my soul, then they warm my heart. The beams of the sun, when they shine scattered up and down in the air, they cause some light, glory, and heat; but when they are concentrated in a burning-glass, then they will be so hot as to burn one's clothes. So the beams of God's mercy in common providence, they will heat the hearts of men, and move them to natural pity; but when our mercy comes from the concentrating of the mercy of God to my soul in Jesus Christ, as it were the burning-glass, then how do they warm and enlarge the heart of a merciful man; when he can set his soul under the beams of God's mercy, contracted and shining through the burning-glass of Jesus Christ himself, and when the heart comes to be warmed with mercy thus, then it is a gracious work indeed, and mercy beyond that of a natural man.

Fifthly, The consideration of my unworthiness. I have had mercy, and not only common mercy, but mercy in Christ, who am so unworthy; and why hath God made any difference between me and others? What is it that causes a difference, so that such a one should be poor, and I have an estate; that they are born of beggars, and I of parents that hath left me a

comfortable estate? Or if providence hath cast it so, though born of as good parents as I, yet they are in misery and I in comfort. Many of you may say you came to the city but with a staff in your hand, and what an estate hath God raised you to! If the grace of mercy works in you the consideration of your unworthiness of anything, that God should make a difference between you and others out of free-grace, and from nothing of yourselves, this doth mightily enlarge bowels of mercy.

Sixthly, Further, the consideration of the relation that these have to God that are in misery. Let it be any creature, yet it hath some relation to God; any brute creature, it is the creature of God, and so it hath relation to him—it is the work of God's hands. But if he be a man, much more if he be a Christian, much more if a saint, much more the relation that a thing hath to God, and being in misery, that moves a gracious man; it doth not move one that is moved in a way of natural pity, but those that are merciful in a gracious way. The relation that anything hath to God, that is a mighty motive to mercy.

Seventhly, The consideration that I shall honour God in this way of mercy. Not merely that I would help others in misery, or be well spoken of, or the like, but I shall honour God in this way of mercy; and it is this that moves my heart.

Eighthly, And the very love to the exercise of mercy itself; and love to such as are in misery, though they be strangers, whosoever they be, this works in a merciful heart. And that is the second thing, the motives, or what it is that sets a merciful man on work in the ways of mercy.

For the object, but a word—for it was intimated in the relation that a thing hath to God. We are to be merciful,

First, To all that are in misery. A good man is merciful to his beast. Look upon your beast, and consider, there is not such a distance between you and that; you are all of one lump. God might have made you a toad, the vilest creature that is, and therefore God expects that you should use his creatures that he hath an interest in, that you should use them mercifully, and not cruelly.

Secondly, We are to be merciful to all mankind. If you do not give to such and such a one as a man, give it to human nature, so far as not to suffer them to perish, except it be in some cases that the Scripture would have others to perish if they continue obstinately in wickedness. As, he that will not work, let him not eat, saith the Scripture; or if they sin, in the way of justice, God doth will that wicked men should perish in their sin—that is, when in a way and course of justice they come to be dealt with; but otherwise, except it be in a way and course of justice that they may be dealt with, we should have pity

upon wicked men when the hand of God is upon them in bringing misery. It is true there is a time coming that the saints shall be so swallowed up with God, with love to God, as they shall pity wicked men no more—yea, shall have no kind of compassion towards them hereafter, whenas it shall be revealed fully that they are reprobates, and that this is the way to honour himself eternally, to withdraw all mercy from them, then the saints shall not pity them. But in the meantime, here in this world, we are to pity them; because, though they be now wicked, we do not know but that they may belong to God, and be made vessels of mercy. Such a wicked blasphemer, and wicked unclean person—the most monstrous wretch that is—who knows but that God may set him apart to be a vessel of mercy to the glory of his free grace; and therefore, because you know not yet the contrary, mercy should work towards him, to pity his soul and body.

Thirdly, The next thing is, that as we should be merciful to all that are in misery, so especially to them in respect of their souls. There is many men and women have pitiful hearts to others; when they see them poor, naked, and ready to starve, then they pity them. But you shall have such pitiful men and women to have no compassion towards their souls; but where mercy is true, it is towards the soul in the first place, and then towards their bodies.

Fourthly, Further, for the object of mercy, the less guilt there is upon any, the more he is to be pitied in his misery. As thus, when any one comes into misery merely by the hand of God, and not by their own wickedness, then there is much mercy to be shewn. I confess, though men should be brought into misery by their wickedness, yet still—except it be in a way and course of legal proceeding in a course of justice—they must not be left to perish; but if it be merely the hand of God upon them, and not their own wickedness that hath brought it upon them, much mercy should be shewn to them. Such as by the providence of God, either by fire, or by wicked men that have broken in upon them, and not through their own fault, they have lived conscientiously, and yet God, by some hand of providence, hath swept away all their estate; abundance of mercy should be shewn to them.

But above all, though we are to do good unto all, yet especially unto the household of faith; to the saints especially our mercy should be shewn unto, for God shews most mercy to them. But it shall be sufficient to name the objects of mercy.

For the gracious manner of shewing mercy to those that are in misery, mercy must have these qualifications:

First, I must never be so merciful as to go against any rule of justice; but there must be a sweet concord between both. Mark how they are knit together:

'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness,' which is not only the righteousness of Christ, but between man and man, and 'Blessed are the merciful.' We must be so merciful, as yet to be righteous. Grace hath a blessed mixture in it; and though one vice be contrary to another, yet one grace is never contrary to another. Justice and mercy are never opposite one to another, but they may have a gracious mixture. I may be a merciful man, and yet hunger after righteousness, that righteousness may prevail in the world. That must be considered in the first place, for the gracious manner of the work of mercy.

Secondly, I must be so merciful as not to do hurt to those that I think to shew mercy to, or to do hurt to others by them. As thus, when men are in misery, for me to shew mercy so as to harden them in their evil way, this is no gracious act; this is a foolish pity. Or to shew mercy to one so as to hurt others; many times mercy may be shewn to one, that is cruelty to many others. Now, in Ps. cxii. 5, there the Holy Ghost, speaking of a merciful man, he saith that 'he guides his affairs with discretion.' He guides them in a discreet way; he doth not do the work of mercy in a lavish way, but considers wisely of the poor, and guides his affairs with discretion.

Thirdly, In the exercise of mercy there must be much simplicity of heart: Rom. xii. 8, 'He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity.' You will say, What is the meaning of that? The meaning of it is this:

First, Not to have any by and squint-eyed aims in my giving; but to do it in the simplicity of my heart, without any by and squint-eyed aims, and in simplicity. Many are merciful; they do things that are good, but they have squint-eyed aims at themselves.

Secondly, Simplicity—that is, not to be partial in the ways of my mercy. God would have me to shew mercy to one more than to another, according as there is reason, but not to be merciful in a way of partiality—that is, though others stand in as much need of my mercy as this man doth, and every way deserves it as well, yet out of private respects I let the course of my mercy run this way rather than the other. This is not to do it out of simplicity.

Lastly, We must so shew our mercy as that we must be sure to tender up that mercy that we shew to others for acceptance in Jesus Christ: to tender it up in Jesus Christ that it may be accepted by God. Lord, may such a soul say, I am unworthy thou shouldst shew any mercy to me, or that thou shouldst accept of any mercy that I tender up to thee. This we see admirably set forth in Nehemiah, who was one of the mercifulest men that ever we read of; yet saith he, chap. xi. 22, 'Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the

greatness of thy mercy.' He was a merciful man, and yet he pleads to be accepted in mercy for the failings that passed from him in the shewing of that mercy; and here in the text, 'Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.' They shall obtain mercy for those failings that they commit in the shewing of their mercy. Thus you see who this merciful man is.

We shall now come to shew that he is a blessed man: Prov. xxii. 9, 'He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed, for he giveth of his bread to the poor.' To open unto you the blessedness of this merciful man, take it in these particulars:

First, When God would describe a man truly godly, he calls him out by this very character, that he is a merciful man: Ps. xxxii. 6, 'For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee,' in the original, *הַרְחִימֵנִי*, it is the 'kind man.' Godly men are called by this denomination of kind ones; and so wherever we have the word 'godly' and 'saints' in the Old Testament, it is the same with that we have in the New Testament, where they are called 'godly saints' and 'godly ones.' It is the same with 'merciful men': to note thus much, that mercy it is the same with godliness. Now take righteousness, as I opened it in the former verse, for the grace of sanctification, and so this mercifulness is a part of that sanctification. It is a part of that righteousness which I shewed you was of such excellency in Ps. xxxii. 6. God doth not instance in any particular grace but in this of mercy: 'The merciful man shall seek him in a time when he may be found.' And in Ps. cxii., 'A good man sheweth favour, and lengtheth; he will guide his affairs with discretion.' And then in ver. 9, 'He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor, his righteousness endureth for ever.' Mercy, it is a special part of righteousness. In James iii. 17, the apostle there describing the wisdom that is from above, he saith thus, 'The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy, and good fruits.' Mark the words, it is full of mercy and gentleness; therefore blessed are these merciful ones, for they are such as God doth cull out to give a character of, that they are godly men.

Secondly, Blessed, because they have so much of that which is so nigh to God, and makes God so excellent and glorious. There is nothing in a saint is nearer unto God than this very disposition of mercifulness. Now God glories in nothing more than in his mercy. This is that which God doth exalt himself withal, and that he doth glory in, that he is the merciful God. In Exod. xxv. the mercy-seat it was raised up on high above all, that it might be seen. And in Scripture God is said to delight in mercy: 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 is a very pleasing thing for God to delight in his mercy; and he is called the 'Father of mercy,' and a God 'rich in mercy.' A man accounts his glory to consist in his riches. If in anything a man doth esteem himself for, it is in his riches, in his wealth; so God's riches are his mercies, and God glories in his mercies; and when God would shew, unto Moses his glory it is in this. Moses he desires to see the face of God, and that God would let him see his glory, Exod. xxxiv. 6; how doth the Lord give a demonstration of his glory? Thus, 'The Lord God, gracious and merciful.' And the chief design that God hath in the world it is to glorify his mercy. In Eph. i. 6, the Lord he delights to glorify his power, his wisdom, and his justice; but he delights to glorify his mercy above all. When the power of God is exalted, when the wisdom of God is declared, God is glorified; but when mercy is glorified, then God is exalted. If mercy make God so excellent, surely that man must needs be very happy that hath much of this disposition in him. And you have seen that the merciful man he hath much of this disposition in him, which is by God accounted to be his own glory.

Thirdly, You are blessed, because you are under many precious promises. It were endless to mention all the promises wherein your blessedness is set forth. In Prov. xi. 25, 'The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself; Ps. cxli. 9, 'He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour;' 2 Cor. ix. 8, which is very remarkable, 'And God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye always, having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.' See how words are heaped up here: 'to make grace, and all grace, and all grace to abound.' And who is it to? 'Unto the liberal, the merciful man.' In Luke vi. 38, 'Give, and it shall be given to you.' The way for to receive more, it is to give out of what we have; and God will so order it 'that you shall have good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over.' See here the latitude and height of expressions that can be. We account it good measure when it is heaped up; but when it is heaped up and pressed down, that is more; but when it is heaped up and pressed down, and then heaped up and running over again, this is as much as possibly can be made. So those that are of merciful spirits, they shall have mercy heaped up, pressed down, and running over. Surely thou must needs be a happy man when thou canst not be in that condition in which thou shalt not have mercy, but mercy heaped up, and running over, to supply thy necessity.

Fourthly, Blessed art thou, because thou hast the blessing of those that are in misery upon thee. The

blessing of the poor is upon thee who art thus merciful; thy prayers are heard, and thy prayers are for thee. They bless God for such a one who hath done them good in their straits: Job xxix. 13, 'The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.' They praise God for them; and in the text, 'they shall obtain mercy.' This is a singular privilege, were there no other scripture in all the word to encourage us to this duty but this, that we shall obtain mercy. We are ready to think that if we shew mercy we may want ourselves, we shall come to beggary, we shall come to poverty, we had need to store up for ourselves. No, we shall grow; therefore in Prov. xi. 25, 'The liberal soul shall be made fat.' Here is a strange expression; what, to gain by liberality? We have many proverbs used among us that doth quite cross Scripture; for we say, 'We had as good be out of the world as out of the fashion;' and God saith, 'Fashion not yourselves according to the world.' We say, 'He is too free to be fat;' and yet God saith here, 'The liberal man shall be made fat.' Saith the Scripture, 'You shall have mercy;' and is it not a sweet thing to find mercy from God? In 2 Sam' xxii. 26, 'With the merciful he will shew himself merciful;' and therefore 'blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' With the froward God will shew himself froward. According to our walking unto God we shall find God walking unto us: if we walk contrary unto him, he will walk contrary unto us; if we walk mercifully towards our brethren, God will walk mercifully towards us.

Fifthly, All the good that we have, it comes from the mercy of God; there is not the least good that we enjoy in any creature but it comes originally from God's mercy. Saith God, Poor soul, thou art of a merciful disposition. Art thou merciful? Dost thou do good to others, and doth thy bowels work towards them that are in misery? Art thou in straits thyself? Here is my mercy to help thee, here is my mercy to pardon thee. It is very observable that those that God intends to save, he doth so work upon them by his grace here as they shall be like him. There shall be such a work wrought upon them to answer God's will in all things. As, to instance, those that God intends to save, they shall choose him here; as those whom he hath elected unto glory, they shall in time choose him here, and elect him. Those that God doth intend to justify by Jesus Christ, they shall justify him and his ways; those that God hath separated for glory hereafter, they shall be separated from the world here; and those that God doth intend to shew mercy to hereafter, shall be of merciful dispositions. Hath God given thee a merciful heart? thou mayest assure thyself that God will shew mercy to thee at the last. Blessed are the merciful, there-

fore, for they shall have mercy; they shall have sin pardoned, they shall have their souls blessed. This is a blessed and a fruitful promise; for have not we need of mercy in our straits? There is none of us all that enjoy the most of creature comforts here but we stand in need of mercy ourselves; and when we shall come in any condition to stand in need of mercy, we may be sure we shall have mercy from God, because the Lord hath wrought in us merciful dispositions towards them that are in misery.

Sixthly, In this very thing thou hast a mighty encouragement and help to faith; for mercy, it is thy own—thou mayest cast thyself upon mercy without presuming. Thou who hast a merciful, loving disposition to the saints in their distress, it is no presuming for thee to cast thyself upon the mercy of God in thy straits. When thou art about to believe, what is the stumbling-block that lies in the way? Saith such a poor soul, Shall such a wretched creature as I have mercy from God? Will the Lord ever look upon me? Lord, thou mayest answer thus: Thou hast wrought in me a disposition to shew mercy to them that are in misery. Lord, if there be but one drop of mercy in me to shew pity to others, is there not an infinite ocean of mercy in thee? Lord, is it not much easier for thee to shew mercy unto me, whenas by that little drop of mercy which I have thou hast gained upon my heart to shew mercy unto others? Here is a mighty help against temptations and discouragements from closing with the mercy of God; for that mercy which is in us is but a drop of the fountain that is in God. Our mercy, if it be true and spiritual, as you have heard it described before, it is but an effect and fruit of the mercy which is in God himself. Lord, it is more easy to thee to shew mercy to my soul than for me to pity them that are in misery. Lord, the misery that is in others requires more of us to relieve them than for thy majesty to relieve us. Lord, thou shalt part with nothing in shewing mercy to me. Thou art infinite in mercy, and thou partest with nothing; but when we shew mercy we part with something, though it be that we receive from God; and therefore it is easier with God to shew mercy.

Lastly, Consider of this, That there is nothing holds men longer under bondage and terrors of conscience for sin than this very thing, than the rigid disposition that is in us towards them that are in misery. Therefore blessed are those that are merciful, that are of a gentle disposition, for this will be a special means to have those throbs and terrors of conscience that are inward in the soul to be removed. We are ready oftentimes to gather such conclusions as these are: Surely the Lord will never be merciful unto me. How can God shew mercy to such a wretch as I am, so stubborn and hard-hearted? I cannot shew mercy

to others that are in misery, I cannot forgive them that are in misery; and surely how can the Lord forgive me, who have done more wrong to him than ever any other hath done to me, and yet I could not forgive them, nor pass by such wrongs myself? Well, thou that art merciful mayest think thus: Lord, must I have a heart to forgive to seven times, yea, to seventy times seven? And, Lord, canst not thou do more to me? Must I forgive till seventy times seven times in a day if my brother offend me? Canst not thou forgive much more? This is a mighty help to faith, and a mighty help to prayer, that the Lord would shew mercy to us in our straits, and help in the time of our troubles: Ps. cxii. 6, 7, 'Surely he shall not be moved for ever.' The way to be established, it is to be of a merciful spirit, and he shall not be afraid of evil tidings; let what times come that will come, he shall not fear them. The days may be clouded, and troubles may grow bigger, but he shall not be afraid of them. These evil tidings shall not affright the merciful man; and that is a famous text that we have in Isa. lviii. 7, 8, when he describes the manner of the fast both in the negative and the affirmative part. He shews what they did in their false humiliations, and then he comes to shew that if they did thus and thus, 'Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here am I.' God will say, Hearken, there is a merciful man cries; there is one that is now in distress and cries to me. I must go down and hearken unto this man's request; I must go and hear what is the matter, it is a merciful man cries. Come, God will say, here am I, call upon me; what wouldst thou have? It is a merciful man that cries, I must go and relieve him. God will say to this soul, Here I am; and ver. 10, 'The light of such a man shall rise in obscurity, and his darkness be as the noon-day;' and ver. 11, 'The Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not.' Thou complainest of deadness and barrenness of spirit: this is the reason, it may be thou profitest no more under the means, because thou art of a wretched, harsh, cruel disposition. But for the merciful, they may go unto God and plead their cause, and say, Lord, I was merciful unto my brethren in their straits, and my mercy it was in obedience to thy command, and therefore, Lord, hear me.

To make application of this point.

First, Here is abundance of comfort to those that are of merciful spirits. Whoever you are that are thus merciful, wherever you are, (though I fear there are but few; like the gleanings after the vintage, they stand but here and there even in great assemblies,) hearken unto your comfort. Hath the Lord drawn

forth your hearts to melt at the sorrows of the saints abroad, though you have had plenty at home, yet you have been in bonds with them, and your comforts have not been so sweet to you as otherwise they would have been, because the church and people of God have been in such straits? You have been in sorrow; though you have enjoyed peace and plenty, this hath taken away the sweetness of your mercies. Know, if it be thus, take your comfort:

First, Thou art eminent in that which is God's eminency; and this is a great excellency. And this is the best service thou canst do; thou canst not do a piece of service more acceptable to God than this thing is. Thou complainest thou canst not pray; thou art disquieted in thy spirits for thy deadness, and dullness, and indisposedness of heart; but hast thou a merciful heart? Know that this is most acceptable to God: Micah vi. 6, 7, 'Wherewithal shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil.' See what large profers they made there to God; shall we come with these? 'Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' No, saith God, none of these; I regard them not, I require them not, 'only to do justice, and to love mercy;' herewithal mayest thou come before God with boldness. It may be thou canst not bring rivers of oil, thou canst not bring such enlargements, such expressions, such fine placed words, yet canst thou bring a heart loving mercy; hast thou but a merciful heart, thou hast that which God delights in.

Secondly, This is a most certain argument of thy election unto mercy who hast a merciful heart: Col. iii. 12, 'Brethren, as the elect of God'—what? 'put on bowels of mercy;' as the elect of God put on bowels of mercy. It is mercy that God gives thee means to relieve others, that God gives thee wherewithal to help them that are in distress. Know it is more to have a heart to shew mercy than an estate to shew mercy. It is a greater mercy to thee for God to make thee willing to shew mercy, than if thou hadst an estate and not willing to shew mercy. And therefore, wherein do you account your riches? In having the world at will, in being in great places, and to do what thou wilt, is here thy happiness? Dost thou account it thy riches to be great in the world, and to have places and rule? If this be thy happiness, know that thou hast little evidence to thy soul of thy election. But if thou wert truly gracious, thou wouldst say, Lord, I bless thee for my estate, for my parts and riches. Ay, but Lord, I bless thee more for a heart to pity them that are in distress; I bless thee that thou hast given me a heart to shew mercy to

them that are in misery; and I bless thee that I may be more serviceable than others by my estate to them which want such an estate. I therefore prize my estate because it doth help me to be more serviceable to God than others: this is as sure a sign of grace as can be. Suppose God hath given you an estate, but withal had left you to a penurious, covetous heart, know thy estate had been a curse to thee; but if thou hast a large estate, and a large heart to do good with thy estate, it is a good sign of true grace.

Thirdly, Thou mayest with comfort expect an enlarged heart in prayer. You complain many times that your hearts are so straitened and dead; would you but examine, is not this the cause, you are so cruel to others?

And when thou comest to any affliction, the Lord will remember, and remember what thou wouldst have done, James ii. 13. Thou wouldst pray better; the Lord will accept of that desire of thine to pray better: 'Mercy rejoiceth against judgment.' There is a scripture which, though you have often read, you do not, it may be, so well understand, or at leastwise it hath been carried contrary to what I conceive the meaning is. Many conceive this scripture to be meant of the mercy of God rejoicing against the judgment of the law and condemnation; but I take it for judgment here—judgment is coming, mercy strives against. And how the Scripture saith, 'That a man shall have judgment without mercy, that was cruel.' When any judgment comes to be executed upon a kingdom, upon families, the mercy of those towards such as were in misery shall cry, and the Lord will hear the cries of mercy in the time of judgment; the mercy which they had shewn to others shall plead for them. Let whatsoever judgments come, that soul may say, the Lord intends mercy to me in it; this merciful man shall be delivered. Though there is a storm abroad in the land, and miseries in all places, yet the Lord will remember this man; he was merciful to them that were in misery, and I will regard this man; his mercy shall come up into remembrance, and say, I am above judgment. A merciful man, he may rejoice in the midst of judgment as being above judgment. The Lord hath discovered himself to me in making me of a merciful disposition to others; therefore, now the judgments of God are abroad, I question not but mercy will triumph over judgment. For me, I shall be preserved; my mercy will plead for me that judgment shall not take hold of me, because, when others were in misery, I was pitiful unto them: 'And therefore, blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' In their troubles the merciful man shall triumph and boast over judgment. Judgment shall not take hold of him, because his mercy shall be remembered in the day of his trouble.