

SERMON XXXVII.

OR,

SAINTS SHOULD TAKE HEED THEY SUFFER NOT FOR EVIL TRULY.

'Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.'—MAT. v. 12.

THE last of these rules of blessedness. It is the suffering of persecution—of reviling for the sake of Christ, for blessed are they. We have spoken of persecution in general, and of reviling more particularly, and the blessedness that there is in suffering either persecution or reviling, when they shall speak all manner of evil—evil that is most unlikely—that hath no kind of show in it; yet they venture to fasten all manner of evil on us, but yet falsely. Let the saints take heed that there be no evil said of them truly, for that is a grievous thing; they are not blessed in that; but when it is spoken of them falsely, and for my name's sake—not for your own wills' sake, for your own lusts' sake, but for the Lord's sake, and then Christ will own you. So certainly Christ hath a special regard to those who suffer anything in his cause, as to have their names anyways wounded; why, he will bind up this wound. In Jer. xv. 15, 'O Lord, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy long-suffering: know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke.' When you suffer for your lusts' sake—for your own passion, you suffer these things for your own wickedness; but when it is for the Lord's sake, then you can go with comfort to prayer. Take heed that Christ do not suffer for your sakes in that sense—namely, for your sin and wickedness. Is it not enough that Christ hath suffered for your sakes in a meritorious way? Suffer for Christ's sake, but let not Christ suffer for yours.

To proceed to ver. 12, 'Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; rejoice, and leap, and skip for joy. In Luke vi. 23, 'Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.' A matter of great joy should be to the saints when they are reviled and persecuted for Christ's sake,—great joy, because it is such a clear evidence that they are in Christ's way, that they are Christ's, and that they are entered far into that way, that they are come to be sufferers for him; rejoice in that. Those good

things you do, it is good to you; but not so much as in suffering, the Spirit of God and glory rests on you when you are reviled. 1 Peter iv. 14, 'If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth on you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.' That for the people of God it is not enough for them to be patient in suffering, but to be reproached. Moses accounted the reproaches for Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. Persecutions for Christ to a true gracious heart, they are riches to him; therefore rejoice.

First, How shall I rejoice, for it is an affliction. 'If any be afflicted let him pray.' I confess when our affliction comes as chastisement for sin, then mourning is called for, but I never find that the Scripture doth call for mourning from the saints that suffer in the cause of Christ, though it is a great evil in itself, yet never calls for mourning. What other afflictions God may send for the sin of his people, yet we do not find that God chargeth this on his people, that they shall suffer for his cause and affliction for their sin; but when we come to suffer for the cause of Christ, God hath a further end in it than to afflict you so as to call for mourning. Rejoice and leap for joy. Why: 'for great is your reward in heaven.' You shall be rewarded for your suffering, every spot of dirt that is cast on you shall be turned into a pearl, shall make your reward more glorious. Your happiness, that happiness that the saints shall have, is called a reward, not a reward of merit, but a reward of free grace. As a father, though he intends an inheritance to his child, yet to encourage him to go to school, he promiseth him such and such a reward, but not out of merit, but out of his free love toward the child. The Lord is pleased to call all the glory in heaven a reward of that we suffer for his name's sake, though mingled with sin, and this is to encourage us, poor creatures, that are led now in hope of a reward, and great is your reward, it is much, a great reward. There is surely a difference in the glory of heaven, if they that

suffer most shall have the greatest reward; they shall have a great reward, because they suffer so much, and this for encouraging in suffering. Surely there is some difference in rewarding for suffering—they shall have a great reward. This is observable, that Christ doth not tell them what reward they shall have, he doth not instance in particular rewards, no, because it is so great as it is not to be limited, as not to be expressed; as we are not able to understand it, therefore Christ names no particular reward; but it is a great reward. Surely our hearts are too narrow when we conceive any limits of God's mercy; when we think thus, If God be merciful to us, thus and thus, then we shall be happy; thou hast too narrow a spirit to put any *thus and thus* on the mercy of God. The mercy of God, it is a deep expression, there is no carnal heart in the world, but as he limits his obedience, so he limits God's mercy, but he doth frame some final contentment that he hopes to have, and if he could have but some things he could be satisfied. A gracious heart is so large, that nothing particularly can satisfy him, and this is the ground why a gracious heart will never limit himself in any duty, but he must put itself into an infinite ocean of service for God; the expectation which such a soul hath from God, it is beyond all finite good whatsoever. Therefore, saith Christ, great is your reward. He doth not name any particular reward.

Again, 'Great is your reward in heaven.' It may be you shall meet with no reward here on earth. As long as you live on the earth you shall be reviled and persecuted; here will never be an end of this; it may be all your lifetime will be spent, and therefore look for your reward higher. If I were persecuted by some, and honoured by others, I did not much care; but it may be you shall be reviled by the wicked, and discountenanced by the godly, so that you shall have no reward at all here on earth, but you are to expect it hereafter. I confess the Lord sometimes is pleased to reward them here on earth, that is by honouring of them in the consciences of those that did revile them. Well, but if it should not be so, if you should have nothing here you must wait for it till you come to heaven, there to have that full reward; and the saints are willing so to do, they are willing to stay for all their reward till they come to heaven. We see such a reality, and certainty, and glory in the things of heaven, that we are willing to stay, and that will make amends for all when it comes. There is no carnal heart willing to stay, but they must have somewhat for the present in hand, but for the staying for that afterward they cannot do it, they have not eyes to pierce the heaven to see beyond the veil. What is this? It is said in 2 Peter i. 9, 'But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.'

Wicked men are purblind, they can see things that are just before them, but they cannot see afar off, but they cannot see heaven, but they look on the things of the earth as realities; but the saints look on the things of the earth as vain things, and empty things, and they look on the things of heaven as reality. The men of the world they trade with God for small things as it were; they must have contentment of the flesh for the present for to stay their carnal hearts, neither do they know what they are; for they trade but for little with God. But now the saints they trade with God for eternity, for glory, for a kingdom, and for a crown; and they are willing to stay till afterward. They care not what becomes of them here, so they have the kingdom of heaven hereafter. There is difference between the service that God hath in the world from men. The Lord hath some that do him service, and they must have present pay. Saith God, You shall have it, and that is your portion. When he hath given thee some outward contentment in the world, that is all you are like to have for ever. But the saints of God, they do not stand for what they shall have; but they do any service for him; he shall have all that they can do; they are resolved to serve him, whatever comes of it. Though they have not that present pay that others have in the world, yet great is their reward in heaven. The reward in heaven is great—a great reward: Ps. lvii. 2, Power from on high—that is, a glorious power, a great power. Jer. xxv. 3, 'Surely there is a reward for the righteous;' whatever they meet with here, surely there is a reward in heaven. Ps. cxix. 89, 'For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven;' there is certainly a reward for the saints. One evidence that there must be a great reward is this, that from the beginning of the world to this day they have suffered so much on earth, that he must have some time to communicate his infinite treasures, and that visibly too. Certainly the power of God will be in a kind answering to his grace and mercy, to work mightily, to manifest the infinite riches of his grace in rewarding. Therefore there is a reward for the saints, and, above all, for the suffering saints.

Secondly, There must needs be a great reward in heaven for them; because the Lord gives the greatest portion of the earth to the wicked, even to the dogs. There are higher things for the saints. If the earth be so excellent that he gives to his enemies, what hath he for his own saints, those that are dear to him, his children that suffer for him? When we look on this world, when we see what a canopy it hath, and bespangled with stars, and see the glory of the earth, and the riches thereof, and consider whose portion this is, even the portion of the enemies of God, a portion of those that God hates: 'The whole Turkish empire is but a crumb, that the master of the family

casts to his dog.* Surely, then, what shall the saints have! Therefore when you see the wicked prosper, reason after this manner, Is it so indeed, that wicked men have so much here? then what shall saints have, those that suffer for him?

Thirdly, A third demonstration is this: The hopes the saints here are raised unto, and that by the Holy Ghost. Their hopes for great things must not vanish, because they are raised by the power of the Holy Ghost: Rom. xv. 13, 'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.' The hopes of the saints are raised, by whom? By God, and by the power of the Holy Ghost. If God will set himself on work, to raise hopes, and the Holy Ghost will set himself to raise up their hopes, surely then they must not be light hopes; surely the object of their hopes is very great, because it is the glory of God, and the glory of the Holy Ghost that raiseth up their hopes; surely they are glorious hopes. Your great men, captains and princes, if they will take a style, a title for themselves from anything, they have some high esteem of it. The hopes of the saints are such things as God takes a title from them. He is the God of their hopes; surely their reward must be a glorious reward, that they do thus hope for.

Fourthly, The fourth demonstration is this: It must needs be a great reward; because it was that that was prepared for them before the foundation of the world was laid. God from all eternity hath been preparing glory for his people; surely that work of God that he hath been preparing from all eternity will be very glorious.

Fifthly, A fifth demonstration is this, That it is a great reward you have; because whenever it comes, it comes unto the saints to that end, that God may declare unto men and angels what his infinite power is able to raise a creature to, and what his infinite mercy is able to bestow upon a creature. We are chosen to the praise of his rich and glorious grace. If this be God's end in choosing us, that he might manifest what the power of his grace is, and what the power of his grace means, here is that reward for you. To what a height an infinite God is able to raise poor creatures to! 'Great is your reward in heaven.'

Sixthly, It must be a great reward, because it is that likewise that is the fruit of the purchase of the blood of Christ, that cost so dear, that must be of as great value and worth that the blood of Christ deserved. As sin is to all eternity crying for more and more wrath to God, because sin deserves more, so the merit of Christ, if thou hast not to the utmost capacity that such a creature is capable of, the merit of Christ will cry for thee; and is not here enough to

* Luther

encourage us in suffering? It is such a reward as Christ is gone before to prepare, John xiv. It is one end of his ascension into heaven, there to make all things fit for his saints and disciples against they come. If you ask me what it is, what! should I tell you of the blessed vision of God, the enjoyment of God, communion with God, communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Scripture tells but little of the glory of the soul, because it would have us to argue ourselves from that which is more sensible; for if the Scripture tells us that the body shall shine as the sun in the firmament, then what shall the soul do? The soul is capable of communion with God, to put you in mind of this, that every time when you suffer anything you act your faith on that glorious reward: 'Blessed are ye when ye suffer for righteousness' sake, and when men revile you; for great is your reward.' In ver. 10, 'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake;' and in ver. 11 the person is changed. What is the reason the person is changed? First, 'Blessed are they,' and then 'blessed are ye;' the reason is because Christ would seem to direct himself unto those disciples that he sent abroad to preach the gospel. As he had spoke to all those that should profess the gospel, 'Blessed are they that suffer for righteousness,' so blessed are ye.

Observe hence—

That the ministers of the gospel are to expect a share of suffering from the evil and wicked world.

'I send you,' saith he, 'as sheep among wolves.' The ministers of the gospel do more immediately fight against the kingdom of Satan than any people of the world. It is a very strange expression that we have in John xvii. 14, 'And have given them thy word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.' Presently after the giving of the word the world hates them; the more they have of the word of truth, the more the world hates them. You know what Christ saith concerning Paul in his conversion, Acts ix. 15, 16, 'But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel; for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.' If he goes to bear the name of Christ, then he must suffer great things.

Secondly, The ministers of the gospel, in regard of their place, they are more in view and in men's eyes than other men are: let them look to themselves, they are in the eyes of every man; they are the white that all men shoot at.

Thirdly, The ministers of the gospel have no weapons to defend themselves withal but spiritual. A magistrate can defend himself, for he hath the sword;

but a minister cannot. And the ministers of the gospel, they set themselves against men's lusts, against their beloved lusts. Let a minister come and preach to them in some general way, and never come to strike home to their lust, then all is well; but if they strike it home to their lust, they cannot bear that, then they must revile him.

Fourthly, The devil knows that he can do no more mischief than to keep the name of ministers down, and to take their esteem off from the people. Indeed for such and such particulars, he shall not so prevail in a great while, so much as he can any way make the ministers vile, to speak anything evil of them. Now let us take notice of this evil world, when even the ministers of God, that are the greatest blessings in the world, in that they come in the name of Christ to open the treasure and riches of the grace of God in that blessed covenant, and should be accepted as angels of the deity in respect of their message, yet this wicked world their hearts are against no people so much as against them. It should be a rule to ministers to walk circumspectly, that there be no matter found in them of objection against them.

Lastly, Labour to uphold that true honour that Christ hath sent you to do in the ministry of the gospel; you know how careful and tender Jesus Christ is of the honour and esteem of his ministers, therefore that you must not receive an accusation against an elder without two or three witnesses. You must be so far from thinking it to be true, not so much as telling it up and down, unless you have two or three witnesses, and so all that are godly should set themselves what possibly they can to uphold the honour of faithful ministers, to have a tender care and esteem of their credit, and beat down all things that may prejudice them.

'For so persecuted they the prophets.'

It is no strange thing that you meet withal, neither is it a new thing that you meet withal; you meet with persecution and reviling, why, account it no strange thing, as Peter speaks about the fiery trial.

Here consider three particulars:—

First, The history how all the prophets, from time to time, have met with persecution, especially the ministers of God; he doth not say, so did they to the saints, but to the prophets.

The second thing should have been to shew you wherein lies the power of the argument, 'That you should rejoice and be glad,' because the prophets were so persecuted.

And Thirdly, What use it is that we should make in that the prophets suffered so much.

First, How the prophets from time to time did suffer so much hardship. If we begin with Abraham you know what he suffered, and afterward Isaac what he suffered, and Moses what reproach he suffered,

in Heb. xi., and of David, if you read Ps. xxxv. 15, 'But in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: yea, the objects' (or as it is in the Hebrew, נִסְּוּ, — אֶנְסֶה, he smote—the smiters) 'gathered themselves together against me, and I knew it not, they did tear me, and ceased not.' And of the church, in Ps. lxxxix. 4, 'We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us.' You may read of Job, how he was called by the basest of people. In Job xvi. 9, 10, 'He teareth me in his wrath, who hateth me; he gnasheth upon me with his teeth; mine enemy sharpeneth his eyes upon me. They have gaped upon me with their mouth; they have smitten me upon the cheek reproachfully; they have gathered themselves together against me.' And Nehemiah, ii. 19, 'But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?' And of the prophet Isaiah, xxviii. 13, 'But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.' There is the scorn that the prophet suffered even in regard of his ministry. It is said that he was sawn asunder, and for his ministry he suffered scorn; the Hebrew words in the sound of them shew a kind of scorn that they did use unto the prophets; here in speaking to them, they scorned him though he was a high prophet; you may read of Ezekiel and Jeremiah how they suffered. The same thing that Christ said of the prophets in all ages, may be said of the apostles and martyrs, and chief reformers in former times, they suffered; those that have been most eminent in work of reformation, they have suffered scorn, contempt, and reviling. Tertullian tells of the Christians in his time, that they were called the public enemies to the state, that they met together in the night, and blew out candles, and committed all uncleannesses, and worshipped an ass's head, scorning at the Christians for a company of foolish people; and Chrysostom was banished by the empress, and much scorn was cast on him. Augustine, what revilings was cast on him in his time. When I spoke of the point of persecution of the disciples, I shewed what their sufferings was in particular, but I referred this till now, what hath been cast on most eminent Christians that are the most reformers of religion. Now Calvin, that was the famous instrument of good for the church of God, some say of him that he was eaten up with worms, and some say he called on the devil, though he was a sweet man, and had a gracious and comfortable death. And for Beza, they object against him that he desired lordship; and they

accuse him to be a froward man and of an implacable spirit, and herein they do verify that they do speak all manner of evil. It is reported that Beza did live without any gall, because he was so quiet that they could never see him provoked; although the enemies would provoke him with a most violent spirit, yet he was as quiet as if he had been a man without a gall. To shew you how it hath been the way of evil men to strive with those that any way have been instruments of good and reformation, and did seek it with the most earnestness and zeal in Queen Elizabeth's days, I mean those that set themselves against prelacy,

it is known how the bishops used them; therefore do not think your names more precious than their names. And why should you think to go easier to heaven than they? why should you think that God should rather favour you than them? and look back and remember that there is the same spirit of darkness still prevailing as ever did; therefore keep your hearts close to God and Christ, and be sure you suffer nothing but for Christ's sake, for then rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

SERMON XXXVIII.

OR,

SOME ARGUMENTS FOR THE HELPING OF SAINTS TO SUFFER.

'For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world.'—MAT. V. 12-14.

OUR Saviour, in the strengthening of his disciples against persecution and reviling, and in helping them in their suffering, amongst other things tells them that they fare no worse than the prophets that went before them—'For so persecuted they the prophets which were before them;' from whence the point was, That the consideration of what the servants of God suffered heretofore should be a means to encourage us in suffering.

First, To shew the history how all the prophets, disciples, and the saints that have gone before, have suffered great and hard things.

Secondly, Wherein the argument lies of rejoicing under persecution.

Thirdly, What use we are to make of the persecution of the prophets. I could handle but the first. To proceed to the second: wherein lies the power of this argument? There is a fivefold strength in this argument, or rather five arguments in it.

First, The same spirit of wickedness that opposed them doth still prevail, and it is the same spirit of truth that is opposed. You see you are opposed: why, it is but the old spirit of Satan, that spirit of wickedness that hath appeared heretofore; it is that that appears against you.

Secondly, Hence you may see that those that are

dear and precious to God, that they may suffer hard things. You will not say but that the prophets were beloved of God, and yet they suffered as much as you, [were] contemned as much as you, reviled as much as you; therefore be not troubled at it, but rejoice and be glad.

Thirdly, If so be God should deal with you otherwise than he did formerly with others, then it might discourage you; but they are no other things than his servants heretofore have suffered. God will lead you to heaven in the same path that he hath led his servants heretofore.

Fourthly, It is the way that God hath brought all his servants into heaven by. Why should you think that God will bring you in a better way than he did others? For so suffered the prophets; the very prophets suffered such things, and then what is your flesh better than theirs? What are your names better than theirs? It is a most intolerable thing that we that are so vile and mean, and do so little service, that we should think it much to do anything in God's cause; that those that have been better than we, have suffered more than ever we did.

The fifth argument is this, That though the prophets have suffered such things, yet the truth of God prevails. We say, if they be imprisoned and perse-