

SERMON VII.

OR,

THE FOLLY OF MEN REBUKED WHO ARE ALL FOR MIRTH.

'Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.'—MAT. v. 4.

2.* HERE is rebuked the vanity and the folly of the spirits of most men and women among us who are altogether for mirth and jollity. They are, as it were, a fish out of the water if they are not in worldly joy and mirth, who place their happiness in this. How contrary is thy judgment unto Jesus Christ! Christ saith here, 'Blessed are those that mourn.' Why so? 'For they shall be comforted.' Thou sayest, Blessed are those that are merry, that have abundance of the creature; but the Spirit of God saith in Eccles. vii. 2, 'It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of laughter.' Now which of these two shall be believed? Shall thy base, carnal heart be believed who placeth all thy happiness in joviality; or the wisdom of God, who saith, 'It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of laughter'? If man had said this, you would have thought him a fool for his pains. Which of you would have made such a choice had it been put to you—Whether you would take delight in the abundance of the creature, company, and the like? Whether you would take content in that or in the house of mourning? Now the Holy Ghost he decides the case: he saith, 'The house of mourning is better than the house of laughter,' for the heart is made better by sadness. There is much good comes unto the soul out of the house of mourning which doth not come from the house of laughter. The heart for the most part is made worse by laughter, but often better by sorrow. What if this dreadful woe should prove to be thy portion pronounced by Christ himself? Luke vi. 25, 'Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.' The time of your sorrow is to come. When you see men live bravely and merrily in the world, and do no service for Jesus Christ, are not useful in their places, you may thus say of them, Alas! here are men that now rejoice, but they shall mourn and weep; their time of mourning is a-hastening. How much better were it to mourn now, than to have an eternity to mourn in! If thou givest thyself to pleasure, and to let thy heart run out after vanity now in thy youth,

then all thy sorrow it shall come together and sink thee to despair. Thou in thy youth, and in the strength of thy days, lettest out thy strength to vanity, and know that thy sorrow is but a heaping up, to come upon thee all at once, and to sink thee into everlasting despair. How canst thou think but that God should look upon thee with indignation, who art so full of sin and wickedness as thou art? Can it be well with thee in the end, when there are so many precious saints in the world that would not for a world sin against God knowingly; who make it their great care and their study how to honour God in their generation? 'And if at any time they are overcome through weakness, they go mourning all the day long.' And are such as these kept down? Have they their time now to mourn and weep, and dost thou rejoice? Dost thou take pleasure, and give up thy heart to take its full satisfaction in the creature? Know thou must mourn sadly. The mirth that these men have, it is from ignorance; the mirth thou hast, it is because thou art ignorant of thy condition, because thou art in darkness. Thou art in darkness; and woe to that mirth that hath no other foundation but ignorance! Nay, these men they must take the advantage of conscience when that is asleep and benumbed; it were impossible for such as these are to be so merry and frolic, did they not take the advantage of their consciences when they are dead and benumbed; for were conscience awake it would fly in their faces, and would say, Thou art a-doing that thou hast no right unto. Now cursed be that comfort that cannot stand with a sound conscience, and that joy of yours which cannot stand with the thoughts of death and judgment—that mirth cannot be good. Oh that you would consider of this! when at any time you have serious thoughts of God, of death and eternity, this damps your joy, when you are in the full career of your pleasures, yet if conscience then hint into you the thoughts of an eternal condition, you have secret qualms come over you. Now thou hast cause, whosoever thou art, to suspect that joy and mirth to be sinful that cannot stand with the

* Continued from preceding sermon.—Ed.

thoughts of God and eternity; therefore take heed lest thou be in the number with him who took his pleasure, and satisfied his soul to the full in the creature, and when he came to die had nothing to satisfy himself withal; oh have a care, lest that be thy portion! Son, remember that in thy lifetime thou hadst thy good things, but now thou art gone; so God may say to thee, who art such a one as makest thy heaven to be here, Thou hadst thy pleasures, thou hadst thy comforts in the world, and there is all that thou art like to have, but now thou art tormented.

The main thing here in this text that I am to insist upon is the third use, which is for comfort and consolation, that I may come up fully to the mind of Christ in this thing, and to do as he did, who made it his work here to comfort those that mourn; and that shall be my work now for the rest of the time. Blessed are ye of the Lord that do thus truly mourn! And here I shall speak,

First, Comfort to those that do truly mourn.

Secondly, Answer an objection that may be made.

Thirdly, Give some directions how mourners should carry themselves in their mourning estate, that they may be comforted.

It is an excellent thing to comfort mourners; and in Job xxxiii. he is made there to be one of a thousand that can speak a word in season to the heavy laden. This is part of the office of Jesus Christ and of the Spirit of Christ, and it is the glory of men. Now certainly that must needs be a great work, and full of glory, that is part of the office of Jesus Christ and the Spirit—for the Spirit he is a comforter as well as a convincer, John xvi. 7—and it is the glory of men. Many men rejoice in bringing others into sorrow; this is a cursed thing to bring any into sorrow, and by so much the more wicked it is, by how much harder it is to comfort those that do mourn. To rejoice in the exercises of the saints' graces in sorrow is no cursed thing; we may rejoice in the exercise of a saint's grace in humiliation; but to bring them into sorrow and mourning, and then to rejoice in it, this is a cursed thing. Perides being upon his death-bed, his friends came about him, and began to speak of his virtues, and of the great authority he had borne, and accounting the number of his victories he had won; he hearing of them, said, That all this while they had forgotten to speak of the best and most noble thing that was in him, which was, that no Athenian had ever worn a black gown through his occasion.³ This he accounted his glory; and we should take heed of bringing men into a mourning condition, that we may be able to say there is not any that were ever made sad or heavy by anything that I did to them.

* *Plut. vita Perides.*

We should be humbled for it if we have done it; and it should be that which we should confess to God, desiring him to pardon it. God glories to comfort men, and not to grieve them that mourn; and if God will not grieve them, certainly we should not. They cannot so much wrong us, whereby we should be incensed against them to grieve them, as we daily wrong God; but yet God saith, Lam. iii. 33, 'He doth not delight to grieve the children of men.' Now that I may come more close to speak to you that are spiritual mourners, take your comfort in these particulars:

First, If thy mourning be gracious, thy very tears and sorrows is a great deal better than the wine of the men of the world; thy tears are more sweet and pleasing to God than the mirth of wicked men can be to them. It is better to be in thy condition than in other men's; thy tears are precious unto God, if they come from a principle of godly sorrow; there is nothing more precious unto him, next unto the blood of Jesus Christ, if they come from a right principle of godly sorrow.

Secondly, Consider this for thy comfort, it may be, if thou hadst not been a-mourning thou wouldst have been a-sinning, thou wouldst have been a-doing that whereby thou wouldst have darkened the glory of God. Now which is the best of these?—judge you. The curse of all thy afflictions is now taken away; that which is the bitterness of sorrow it is taken away from thee by Jesus Christ, and thy mourning is rather upon mistake than otherwise. Thou hast a right to comfort, though thou dost not see it, and thou mournest because thou dost not apprehend thy right to it; for what is there, or what can there be, to discourage thee or to keep thee off from comfort, seeing the curse of every affliction and the evil of sin is done away?

Thirdly, Consider that all thy sorrows are measured out by God, who is thy Father; thou dost not lie at the dispose of wicked men to mourn how much they will, or when they will, but thou art at the dispose of God, who is thy Father. Now do you think that you who are parents, if it were in your power to deliver your children from anything that did tend to hurt them, would you not do it if it were for your children's good? Now you are at God's dispose, and you shall not sorrow nor weep one tear more than your Father sees is for your good. God he takes notice of all thy sorrows, he bottles up all thy tears, and himself is afflicted in all thy afflictions: Isa. lxiii. 9, 'In all their afflictions he was afflicted.' God is sensible of all our miseries though other men should not mind them: as it is too, too often seen when any of the saints are under the clouds, that they are in an afflicted condition, though they were in favour before, they are frowned upon then. But now God he

doth not do so; thou canst not be so sensible, but God is more—God is more sensible of thy sufferings and takes care of thee.

Fourthly, Consider for thy comfort that Christ was a man of sorrows, and in thy sorrowing thou art but conformable unto him; and why shouldst thou think that to be a burden wherein thou art made like to Jesus Christ? Nay, Christ's sorrows were to sanctify thine, therefore did Christ sorrow that thy sorrows might be sanctified. Now if God order Christ, who was the Son of his dearest love, to be a man of sorrows, thy condition is not so sad as thou takest it to be, seeing Christ was so, and thou art conformable unto him in this. Now why should we think much to be like unto Christ? Did God not think it too much to make Christ to be a man of sorrows for thee, and wilt thou think it much to be a man of sorrows that thou mayest be conformable unto him?

Fifthly, Let this be for thy comfort, to consider thou hast an interest in him that is the God of all consolation; the darkness of thy condition it cannot hinder thine interest in God. Thou hast comfort in the promise now as certain and as sure as if thou hadst it in real possession; and thou shalt have it most certainly hereafter, and the time is coming that thou shalt have full consolation, and God will reckon with the wicked for all their mirth. He will both reckon with them for causing them to be sad, and they must give an account for all their merry hours. Their mirth will be a bitter portion unto them, when God shall come to charge the guilt of all upon their spirits. Oh what a difference will there then be between thee and them at that day! when thou for a few days hast mourned and shalt be comforted in the end, and they for a few days have rejoiced, and in the end shall have an eternity of sorrow.

Sixthly, But it may be poor souls may here say, It is true, here is great comfort, here are precious consolations indeed, but my afflictions are great; they are greater than others. Were I so and so afflicted I could bear them; had I the burden that such a one bears I could be contented, and submit under it.

Now for thy comfort here, know that perhaps this comes from the distemper of thy spirit, rather than from the burden of the affliction; the distemper of thy spirit may be great, and that causes the burden to be heavy. The affliction is not so great, but thy heart is not willing to yield to the affliction; were thy heart willing to submit to the hand of God the affliction would be easy.

And then thou hast many mercies mingled with thy afflictions; there is none of you can say that your afflictions are pure, but they are mingled. God might have brought upon thee pure afflictions, pure miseries upon you, and you might have been deprived of all the very glimpses of mercies; but in your

saddest hours you have some cordials—more mercy than affliction. I am confident that there is none here in this assembly whose afflictions are the greatest, but his mercies are greater.

And then consider that God suffers more by thy sins, than thou canst suffer from God's hand in thy afflictions. The darkening of his glory in the least degree is a greater evil than any affliction that thou canst endure; and this should support thy spirit, to consider that God suffers more; and therefore thou shouldst not be unwilling to suffer something, seeing God suffers more than thou canst.

Seventhly, If thou wouldst be comforted, consider this: the way that God takes to comfort his saints, though thou hast it not in sense, thou mayest have it in faith; and therefore exercise faith, and fetch it in that way. Set faith on work in the promise, and let that bring out the comfort of the promise. Sense is not the way by which God comforts his people, and if we look for comfort in a sensual way we mistake ourselves; therefore let us labour to fetch in comfort from the exercise of faith. And indeed we should more prize those comforts that come from the exercise of our graces than from any sensible apprehensions. When thou canst not see comfort in the creature, know it is God that thou hast to deal withal, and that is thy comfort. God hath not placed the creature to be the object of thy comfort, but himself; and therefore when thou seekest that in the creature, when he hath appointed himself to be thy comfort, thou dost undervalue God, and goest the wrong way to find comfort. In Isa. li., 'I, even I, am he that comforteth thee: who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man?' Consider that God saith to thee after this manner, I am he that comforteth thee. Art thou disquieted? Look upon God thus saying to thee, Why art thou cast down, O poor soul? Is there not more comfort in my word, in my power, than in anything which thou makest the object of thy disquiet? In Isa. lviii., 'I create the fruit of the lips, peace,' &c. Thou canst not see which way thou shouldst be comforted, and therefore because thou canst not thou thinkest it is impossible; but when thou canst not see comfort thou shouldst consider that God can create comfort for thee; thou shouldst look upon God as a creator of comfort, and not lie down in discouragement. God will rather go about his first work again of creation than that thou who art a true mourner shalt want comfort; he will fall a-creating comfort for thee. And this should strengthen your faith, and stay up your souls in the saddest times of darkness. Why, there is nothing too hard for God; as he made all things of nothing, by the bare word of his power, at the first, dost thou think that he is not able to create comfort for thee now? If God go to work do not fear thy comfort.

Eighthly and lastly, Suppose thy condition were such as there was never any in the world in the like case, yet thou mayest be comforted notwithstanding. I suppose there is not any here in this congregation that are in that trouble of spirit or body, but that there hath some of the saints been in the same, if not worse. But grant that there were never any that ever were in the condition that thou art in, yet there is comfort for thee from this scripture: in Isa. lxiv. 4, 'Since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, besides thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.' Hast thou but a heart to wait upon God in thy mourning condition, God hath mercy and comfort for thee that none knows of. Oh, this should be an encouragement for thee to wait upon God. What though we know not the comfort; God doth. And thus I have endeavoured to open this box of consolation under this head, which is the first particular in this use.

The second is to answer a question that may here be propounded. But you will say, the promise here saith, 'They shall be comforted;' but I fear this don't belong to me. I have mourned a long time, and yet cannot be comforted; I have been in sadness of spirit, and I cannot find the promise made good to me; how should I support myself in this case?

First of all, Hast thou mourned? Perhaps thou hast sinned more than sorrowed. Examine therefore thy heart well; hath not thy sins been more than thy sorrows? Therefore be not discouraged. And what is this sorrow to eternal sorrow? what is this inch of sorrow and mourning to an eternity of misery? But thou art delivered from the hazard of miscarrying to all eternity, and therefore this consideration should sweeten all thy sorrows; though thy condition be sad, yet thou art delivered from eternal perishing.

Secondly, Consider, that faith makes comforts future as present to thee; and it is the glory of faith, and that wherein the excellency of it doth consist, to make a mercy in a promise that seems a great way off to be present. As Abraham by faith saw the day of Christ afar off, so faith will represent a mercy to the soul in the promise that seems to be at a great distance as present. As despair makes hell and the wrath to come present unto the wicked who have enlightened consciences, who have the sense of their sin set home upon their consciences, it makes the wrath to come as present that they cry out many times they are in hell while they are upon the earth; so faith it makes a mercy to be certain though not in possession. Hast thou no comfort, no glimpse of love in thy holy converse with God? Look into thy spirit and see whether thou hast no bunches of Canaan's grapes in thy soul; this is a sign thou shalt have more if thou

hast any. If thou hast but a spark of divine love, gather from thence thou shalt have more; but if thou canst not discern any glimpse of God, yet we have the word and ordinances now. Why have we these, but that we may support our spirits with them? This was that which David did support his heart withal, in Ps. cxix. 49, 50, 'I had fainted in mine affliction, had not thy word comforted me.' The word of God is sufficient to support the soul in the darkest of times of sorrow, and when thou findest the least comfort in thy soul in sense, then fly to the word and fetch it out by faith.

Thirdly, Consider, though it be long before comfort come, yet this is no strange thing that thou art kept without comfort for a while. The most precious saints that ever God had have been kept a long time without comfort; though they have done God much service, and have been very faithful with him, yet they have walked in darkness for all this, and their hearts have been at a distance from God in point of comfort, as we may see in Heman: Ps. lxxxviii. 7, 14, 15. See how he speaks there, 'Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, I am pressed down even unto hell, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves; the terrors of the Almighty they stick fast upon my spirits; Lord, why castest thou off my soul, why hidest thou thy face from me? Shall I never be remembered any more? I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up; while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted.' He was even a man of sorrows; here is the condition of a godly and wise man: so David in Ps. cxix. 81, 82, 'My soul fainteth for thy salvation; mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?' When I read thy word I read that which may comfort me; but I cannot be comforted. I read those scriptures that have comforted others, but, alas! I cannot find any comfort for me; they speak no peace to me. Lord, when wilt thou comfort me? So that this is no strange thing; thou hast companions in this thy sorrow, in this heavy affliction of thine, do not say God never did the like to any. No; there are records in Scripture you see of other-guess men than you are who have been in the clouds.

Fourthly, Consider, all this while though comfort play, yet thy sorrow is a working comfort for thee; thine afflictions are but working greater consolations, and when comfort comes thou wilt see cause to bless God that comfort came no sooner. Thou wilt not have any cause to repine, but to bless God that comfort was so long delayed; thou wilt say then, I had been undone had I been delivered sooner. It was the speech of Mr Bates in prison, I bless God I am not in my own or in my enemies' hands in point of sorrow or affliction; for were I in mine own hands, I should come out of trouble too soon, were I in mine enemies' hands, they would keep me too long;

but I am in the hand of God, who knows when it is best for to deliver me. So then wait on God patiently; though comfort may stay, yet when it doth come, thou shalt see that it was worth the waiting for. What though it be till death, what though thou hast not comfort till the last hour, yet eternity will make amends for thy staying.

Fifthly and lastly, Consider, that this is the time of mourning, and we know things are seasonable and best in their time. This is a Christian's seed-time. In the world we must have trouble, and through many tribulations we must enter into heaven. We know the husbandman; he is contented to endure storms and hardships in seed-time, with this consideration—the harvest is a-coming. So, though thou now sowest in tears, there is a time of reaping in joy.

But here is that which troubles me, saith many a soul: I would be contented to wait till God come, were I assured that this promise did belong to me—this were that would stay up my heart indeed. I would be contented to do God service to the uttermost of my power, and to endure any affliction, and account myself happy, if he would employ me in any thing. Were I but assured of this, that the promise were mine, then it would support me. But I fear that this promise belongs to others, and that I have nothing to do with it.

For answer to this: we should labour to get our mourning into a gracious frame, and then we may be sure we shall have comfort; which brings me into the third thing which I propounded to you concerning the rules.

The third thing propounded in this use is this: how we may so order our mourning that it may comfort us. How may I so order my sorrow that I may comfort myself with this—that the promise belongs to me, and that our consciences may tell us we are blessed from this word of promise? Though others see us sad and heavy, yet how may we so carry ourselves that they may say, these are blessed, though in a sad condition? Now for this I would entreat you to take notice of these rules.

First of all, (which I desire you would principally mind.) In your mourning be sure that you keep good thoughts of God. Whatsoever your troubles be, let them not raise tumults and hard thoughts of God. Let not the devil prevail so far over you as to cause your hearts to rise against God. This hath been the great care of the saints, to keep down their hearts from this distemper. In Ps. xliiii. 5, see how David there chides his own heart, and rebukes it; he gives it a secret check and a curb. 'Why art thou cast down?' My soul, thou wouldst be a-rising against God now, but come down. Why art thou cast down? I will go unto God, my exceeding joy. It is a good

thing when we have any reasonings in our hearts about the sadness of our states to lay this conclusion in the bottom. 'Yet God is good to Israel;' yet God is good, though I am under misery and sorrow; yet God is good to the saints—those that are in a sad condition. Those that are in a sad condition love to be musing and meditating on their sorrows and afflictions in their thoughts. But when thou doest thus, be sure you lay this foundation first before ever you think of your sorrows. 'Yet the Lord is good;' whatsoever becomes of me, the Lord is good, and his counsels are sure and steadfast. David was much cast down in his spirit in Ps. lxxiii. 1, yet see how he lays this for a conclusion: 'Yet God is good to Israel.' So say thou thus: Yet the Lord is good to my soul; whatsoever sense saith, and whatsoever temptations say, or Satan would make me believe, 'yet God is good to Israel,' yet God is good to my soul. So in Jer. xii. 1, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee, yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments.' Mark how he lays this before he would go to reason the case. He justifies God. 'Thou art righteous, O Lord, yet let me reason with thee.' So when thoughts arise in our hearts about our sad conditions—when we ponder and muse upon them in our hearts, yet let us be sure to say, 'Thou art righteous, O Lord,' and then we may consider of our afflictions, and weigh them in the balance when this principle is laid at the bottom. So that good man in Ps. lxxxix. 38-52—there we have a sad story, yet he begins with the mercy of God, and exalts the mercy of God in the first place. And having raised faith to the very heavens in the exaltation of God, then he expatiates himself in his sorrows and in the sorrows of the church. When the heart is established in God's love, in the covenant, and in the mercy of God, then we may expatiate our sorrows; but before ever thou lettest out thy heart into sorrow, be sure thou viewest the love of God in the first place. And in the close of the psalm, after that sad story there reckoned up, he concludes, 'Blessed be God for evermore,' and he puts two asseverations to it, 'Amen, and amen.' As if so be he would have it taken notice of, God is good in the beginning; and though there be a bitter piece in the middle, yet he concludes, 'Blessed be the Lord,' and would have it taken notice of by this asseveration, 'Amen, and amen.' So let us reason thus: My condition is very sad, and I know not almost what to think of myself, but God forbid that I should think hard thoughts of God. No; I will say, 'yet the Lord is righteous.' Perhaps you have seen the saints suffer hard things for God and his cause, and your spirits begin to rise perhaps, and you begin to question the faithfulness of God, and the love of God towards his people. Oh, God forbid that this should be in any of you! Remember these scrip-

tures, and let it be the conclusion of your hearts in the saddest state you can be in, 'Blessed be the Lord for ever, Amen, and amen.'

Secondly, Be sure to take notice of all the mercy thou hast from God in the afflictions thou art in. Let not any affliction drown the mercy thou hast. It is very sad many times to see how one or two afflictions hinders the sight of many mercies that the saints do enjoy. A little thing will hinder the sight of the eye; a penny laid upon the eye will keep it from beholding the sun or the element above; so a little affliction, it darkens and hinders the soul from seeing a multitude of mercies; every little trouble darkens God's mercies. We should take heed of this; be sure to bring in our mercies with our afflictions; whenever we reckon up our sorrows, number our mercies with them. In Ps. ciii. 2, David was there lying for his life, and yet we see what a wonderful sweet frame his spirit was in, how full of praises was he: 'Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.' Praising of God in a sad condition is sweet melody in the ears of the most High.

Thirdly, Take heed of a sullen, dogged disposition, either towards God or man in thy sorrows. It is very usual for men in a troubled condition, when they are in sorrow, to add frowardness to mourning; but we should labour to take heed of this as a great evil. Labour for a quiet and meek spirit. Men when they are pleased then they are merry and cheerful, and of a very good disposition; but when they are in affliction, when they are in pain or sorrow, then they

are rugged and dogged, so that no man knows how to speak to them almost, they are so froward and touchy. This is a very ill disposition, and God doth not allow of it in trouble of sin.

Fourthly, Take heed of determining against a comfortable condition in sorrow, that it will never come. Say not that comfort will never come, because thou hast it not for the present. And therefore when comfort doth come, many are so untoward that they will not receive it, because they will make their determination good. God saith to such a soul, 'Peace be to thee;' but saith the soul, This is too good news to be true, I will not receive it because I will make my determination good. As Rachel, who refused to be comforted, so many in their trouble of spirit refuse comfort from the word—this is unkind dealing with God. In Job xv. 11, 'Seemeth the consolations of the Almighty a small thing to thee?' know that the Lord expects that thou shouldst thankfully fall down and accept of a crumb of mercy that he tenders to thee. Look upon thy unworthiness, that thou art unworthy that God should speak a word of comfort to thee; but if the Lord shall come in with his consolations of free grace, welcome them. Bless God thou mayest have mercy upon any terms. As the woman of Canaan said, 'The dogs have crumbs,' so say thou, I am but a dog, yet, Lord, let me have a dog's portion. I will thankfully accept of it at thy hands. Oh be thankful for the least mercy, and it is the ready way to have more, and the Lord in his time will give out more mercy to thee.