

set the dogs upon them to tear them. And this hard usage the people of God have met withal from time to time. They indeed desire to walk righteously before the Lord. Now there is so much beauty and excellency in the ways of righteousness, that men dare not persecute under that name. Therefore they will put some other name upon it, and raise some nickname and slander upon this people; and under that they fall upon them, and there they suffer. So that the saints may suffer for righteousness' sake by evil men, and yet they are not aware of it. Now something I had thought to have spoken by way of

conviction, to convince many men whose hearts are against the people of God for righteousness' sake, and yet they do not think so. And though they plead that it is for this reason and the other that they are thus and thus, yet it is for righteousness; that lies at the bottom. And it would be a good means to restrain some men, if not a means to turn them back, and to cause them to begin to bethink themselves, were they but convinced that it were for righteousness. But this would require more time than we have for the present; and therefore we shall let it pass.

SERMON XXXIII.

OR,

REASONS WHY RIGHTEOUSNESS MUST EXPECT TO SUFFER.

'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'—MAT. v. 10.

JOHN preached in a way of terror: 'Now is the axe laid to the root of the tree.' Christ's preaching is to convey his doctrine by shewing them to be blessed that do embrace it. In this long sermon of Christ, he begins with blessedness; his blessing is such as is above the apprehension of reason, even in every particular. He begins with the poor, and ends with the persecuted; blessed are the poor in spirit, and blessed are they that are persecuted.

Righteousness is enough to stir up the hearts of men to oppose it, and to cause them to persecute it. For that you have scripture plentiful: 1 John iii. 12, 'Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him?' Surely he did him some wrong—he did not behave himself like a brother. Cain was the elder brother, and Abel the younger, and he did not know his distance. No, that was not the matter. 'Wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.' There was no other reason why Cain fell upon his brother, but because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous. It was for righteousness' sake, and there is the first persecution that we read of in the world. I will name but another scripture: 1 Peter ii. 19, 'For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience towards God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.' There is a suffering merely for conscience towards God. I shall need name no more.

The reasons are these:

First, Because that righteousness itself, it is that that doth oppose the corruption of men's hearts, it is that that crosses men in the ways of their corruption, and men can endure much in anything but only against their corruptions, against some sinful distempers of their hearts. Righteousness in one kind opposes one man's corruptions one way, and another's another way, but all men's corruptions are opposed by righteousness. As a godly man can bear anything, but only when it is against righteousness, so wicked men can bear anything, for some are of patient and quiet spirits, but only in that that opposes their corruptions, and that they cannot bear.

Secondly, Again, righteousness is such a thing that carnal hearts see no reason for. They see men to be forward in a way of profession of righteousness, but they cannot understand it; it is a hidden thing to them. So that in 1 Peter iv. 4, 'They think it strange that you should not run with them to the same excess of riot;' that you will not do as they do.

Thirdly, Righteousness condemns the world; as it is said of Noah, that he condemned the world. Were it not for some men whose righteousness is raised up to a higher pitch than others, other men would be accounted good honest men; but when there are some that are raised in a profession higher than they, upon this they are condemned; even in their

own consciences they are condemned in part; and condemned by others that do behold them for coming short of that righteousness that others do attain to. And this they cannot bear, but their hearts fret against.

Fourthly, Righteousness causes men to hold to their principles in a constant settled way, however times alter. Let times alter this way or that way, righteousness, if it be engrained in the hearts of men and women, it will make them hold to their principles, and go on in their way, let heaven and earth meet together. And the truth is, there is no way to keep from sufferings, but to have such principles as may bend this way or that, according to the times. Those men, I will warrant you, will keep from sufferings. You have men that are very witty to find out distinctions, so as they can suit themselves to all times. If the times go this way, they can have a distinction to suit that; and if the times turn, they have a distinction to suit that; and if they turn a third time, they have a distinction to help them there. But now, if righteousness prevail in the heart, they keep on in their way; and because the times do change up and down, they must meet with opposition. The wind doth not oppose weather-cocks, but turns them according to it; but now, if you set up a thing that will not turn, the wind blusters against that if it turn not with it. Now, righteousness keeps the heart in a sweet way towards God, let the wind turn which way it will; and therefore must needs have the wind come blustering against them; they keep close to their principles. And the men of the world, they think it is nothing but stoutness of their hearts; whereas indeed God knows, and their own consciences know, that it is those principles of righteousness that they have in them that keep their hearts steady with God. Therefore they must suffer.

Fifthly, Righteousness, it holds forth a special claim of interest that some men have in God more than others, and the world cannot bear that. But now, when men walk in ways of righteousness beyond others, this holds forth unto the world that those men do claim a special interest in God more than others. And this makes the world storm at it, and therefore righteousness must expect to suffer.

By way of application.

First, Here we may see the wickedness of the world, that would oppose righteousness. Righteousness! That that should make all the world in love with it, and enamoured at the beauty of it! And yet so it is, that when righteousness comes abroad in the world, it is that that is the very mark that ungodly men shoot at. Righteous men should be accounted the greatest blessings in the world. Indeed they are; and if the world did but know it, they would account righteous men, that should hold forth the image of God before others—they would account

them to be as great blessings to the world as the sun, moon, and stars are, and a great deal more. But now, such is the wickedness of the world, that these they make the object of their wrath and hatred, to persecute them.

Secondly, Is it righteousness that is persecuted in the world? Do not, then, judge any cause unjust, unrighteous, because it is persecuted. Do not think that therefore the cause is not righteousness, or those persons are not righteous, because they are persecuted in the world; nay, rather it is an argument of righteousness. If we should make that to be the argument to sway our judgments, certainly Christ himself and his apostles should not be accounted righteous, nor their cause a righteous cause. Those men that lived in Christ's time, if they should have gone by this rule, that such as are opposed and persecuted, they are the worst people, surely their cause is not good; then Christ must be accounted unrighteous, and his cause so. Oh, never judge so; this is an unrighteous judgment.

Thirdly, Let men take heed that they do not rest themselves too much in a righteous cause, as to think that that shall be enough to free them from suffering. No; you are deceived in this. Many people think, Well, what care I? my cause is good. What then? Do you think that that shall keep you from suffering? Oh no. Your cause may be good, and your persons good, and you may manage your cause well, and yet suffer for all that. And therefore prepare for sufferings.

Fourthly, and then lastly, If righteousness must be persecuted, let those that profess righteousness take heed they give no other occasion of persecution but their righteousness. The world will persecute you, do you what you can; be you never so righteous, you must meet with troubles. Therefore, seeing you must meet with opposition in the world, take heed you do not suffer as evil-doers; let not your sufferings be for such things as your consciences shall tell you you have not done well in. Oh, the people of God had need walk very exactly in the midst of the world, for there is something they must suffer. Oh, let them not add to their sufferings. I have often thought this, that when such as are professors of religion live among men that are carnal and wicked, because they must keep constant unto the principles of religion, and resolve to suffer for them, therefore they had need, of all other things, walk the most inoffensively of any, and be willing to be the servants of all men, so far as they can with a good conscience, that thereby they may declare that when they do anything in way of opposition unto those that they live among, it is nothing but merely conscience puts them upon it; whereas now, if men that profess religion have a sour, stubborn spirit in things that they

may yield to, then when they out of conscience are put upon the standing out against those that they live withal, and cannot yield, yet such as they live among will judge that the reason why they do not yield it is not out of conscience, but stubbornness; and therefore that they may convince the world that when they do stand to anything that is against them, that it is not out of stubbornness, but merely out of conscience. And it concerns all the professors of religion, in whatever they are able, to yield to others—to be willing even to be servants to them, and to be as pliable to them to do any good unto them, and thereby to convince them that if there be anything wherein they do not yield, it is because they cannot, not because they will not.

But to come to that which is the main—

Persecuted for righteousness.

You will say, How can that be? Is there any that will oppose men for doing well? Surely there is somewhat else in it. Suetonius reports of Tiberius that, having a mind to have a virgin to be strangled, some come to him and tell him that it is against the law of the Romans that any virgin should be so used. Upon that he gave order to have the virgin deflowered, and then she might be put to death. So do the men of the world do with such as are righteous, and righteous causes. It is true, they have something in their consciences that tells them they must not oppose that that is righteous; therefore they will deflower it, and labour to put misapprehensions upon it, that then they may oppose it with the more freedom.

But certainly men may persecute righteousness that are not aware of it themselves. Many men that, if they were certainly and fully convinced that this is righteousness, and a righteous cause, they would not oppose it, yet they may oppose righteousness. There may be that colour put upon things whereby they may think themselves free, and yet God sees their hearts are against righteousness.

As, first, Certainly all men in the world naturally have their hearts opposite to righteousness; therefore where there is not a new nature there is an opposition to righteousness. Now most men are still natural, therefore they do oppose righteousness. If we should come into the vilest place that is, and speak with every man: What! do you hate righteousness? why, they would defy you. I believe there is not one in all this city, from one end to the other, but if you ask them the question, Do you hate righteousness? they would abhor you: yet this is a certain truth, that all men naturally are enemies to righteousness, therefore surely there are some that are against righteousness, that know not of it themselves.

Secondly, Men of great parts, that are able to un-

derstand things very far, yet they may be opposers of righteousness. Say many poor people, What! scholars, learned men, they know whether it be good or no; and if they knew that it were good they would never oppose it. Oh you are much mistaken; for some men may go against their very consciences. But always men of the greatest parts do not understand most of the mind of Christ; the scribes and pharisees were the most knowing men in the time of Christ, and yet the greatest opposites to Jesus Christ.

Yea, thirdly, Men very civilly righteous, yet may oppose righteousness; as now, the scribes and pharisees, they were civilly righteous. So it is said concerning Paul, that he persecuted the church, and was mad against them. What was this Paul when he was such a persecutor? he was no drunkard, he was no whoremaster, he was no blasphemer, according to the apprehension of the times then; but he saith of himself in Phil. iii. 6, 7, that 'concerning the law he was blameless.' Paul, before his conversion, walked in such a civil way as no man could accuse him of any way of evil; he walked blameless, and yet a mad persecutor of righteousness. And it is said of Trajan, which caused the third of the ten primitive persecutions—Trajan, of all the emperors, he was one that was the most civil, just, and righteous of any. And I remember these two or three things are said of him: that when he was an emperor he did believe himself towards his subjects, as, if he had been a subject, he would have had his prince behave himself towards him; that is the first thing is said of him. Secondly, That being emperor, when he gave the sword into the hand of an officer, he had this speech—'When,' saith he, 'that I do justice, use this sword for me; if you see that I do injustice, use it against me,' to his own officer. And then a third thing is this, That when an emperor was made, they did use to wish the happiness of Augustus to him, the uprightness of Trajan. And yet this man a most deadly enemy to the Christians, and a most abominable persecutor; such a man as this, yet so civil, morally just and honest.

Ay, but you will say, he was of a hard nature, though he were so civil, just, &c.

Therefore I add, in the fourth place, That a man may be of a very sweet nature, and yet be a great persecutor. Though of a very loving, sweet nature otherwise, yet when he comes to oppose righteousness, he may be very fierce and furious. It is said of Titus Vespasian that he was the very delight of human kind, *Delicia generis humani*, and yet a very great enemy to the people of God.

Ay, but he was of another religion, though he were of a sweet nature.

Fifthly, But further, then, a man or woman may

be very devout in the profession of religion, and yet a great persecutor—and sometimes the greatest. Those that are very devout in their own way, if any go another way that they do not apprehend, they will persecute them most, and for that you have a text in Acts xiii. 50. Paul he preached, and was much opposed, but by whom? How did the people come to oppose Paul? 'But the Jews,' saith the text, 'stirred up devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.'

Ay, but can you tell us any one example that ever any godly man persecuted another?

I confess if you ask me the question whether ever you find any godly man, that had true godliness, to persecute others that were godly, you put me to a great stand; I had need search from Genesis to the Revelation to find an example. And I think I can tell you of one, that in one passionate act did it, and that was King Asa; when the prophet came to him and told him the mind of God, his heart was enraged against him, and struck him, and put him into prison. I confess I remember not any other example but him; and the Scripture speaks of him to be a godly man; therefore this is more dangerous for those that do persecute.

Secondly, it is more grievous to those that are persecuted, because their persecution is such as hath no former example. Indeed, when I come to the next verse, I shall shew you how it hath been the condition of the people of God to be persecuted; but I cannot shew you that it ever was their lot to be persecuted by godly men. Therefore if ever we fall into an age wherein godly men suffer by godly men, it is a time unparalleled, that never was in the world before that we read of. We never read in all the book of God that godly men suffered in a constant way, but only that particular act, and therefore that persecution is the sorest.

If you will say, How may we discover men that they do oppose righteousness, though they do not know it themselves? First, I will tell you that the Scripture is plain that men may oppose righteousness, and godly men, and yet they may think that they do God good service. In John xvi. 2 Christ foretells concerning his disciples, they must make account to suffer such things from men, that 'shall think that they do God good service that kills them.' But you will say, How may it be discovered?

I would discover it first by this, when men shall oppose that that comes under the name of righteousness before they have examined it, and come to understand it. There is a kind of show of righteousness in it, and as soon as ever there appears a show of it, before they have examined the thing whether it be real or no, they fly out upon it, and against it. Truly

here is a dangerous sign that the heart is against righteousness. As I would instance in this similitude: suppose a man sees the broad seal, and without any more ado, before he hath examined whether it be it, yea or no, he takes and stamps it under his feet, will not this man be charged for felony, if not treason? It may be he will say, I knew not what it was. Ay, but it will be answered, You should have examined whether it was it or no. And so certainly when anything comes under the name of righteousness, and hath a show of religion in it, it is true it may be it is not right; but however, stay till you examine it; for the thing that a man opposes, that hath but a pretence of righteousness in it, a man had need be very sure that it is but a pretence, and that it is not righteousness. A man must take heed, when he is to do a thing, that he knows what he doth. If I were to do an action, if it had any kind of doubtfulness in it, I am bound in conscience to examine strictly before I do it; but if I come to make another man suffer for not doing such a thing, or for doing it, I had need be very sure then indeed. Observe this rule in all things wherein you oppose others, I mean in religion, or join with them that do oppose: Go upon sure ground, examine things thoroughly, be able to give an account of it; be able to say, Well, I do oppose this, for I have this ground and this reason for it, I have examined it, and I find it to be against the mind of God, and therefore I do oppose it.

Secondly, When the more loose any man grows in his life, the more opposite he is against such a way; and if at any time he be better and more restrained, then he comes to have better thoughts of such a way. Surely this is very suspicious, that what he doth oppose, it is righteousness that he doth oppose. As now, that you may plainly know what I mean: sometimes men are a great deal better than at other times. Some men, though they have very profane principles, and are very wicked men, yet at some times they are more strict. Perhaps they have some stirrings of conscience, and have some restraint upon their spirits, and have some common gifts that keep them in; but now at other times this restraint that is upon their spirits will not hold, but their corruptions do grow too strong for this restraint, and they break the cords, and go against their consciences. Now, then, let me examine their hearts in this. How are your hearts affected to such a cause or person when you are in your best condition? It may be you begin to have good thoughts then of such men and of such causes, that at such a time, when your lusts are most hot and strong and violent, you are hottest and violentest against. Here is a very suspicious thing. It is righteousness that you do oppose, for certainly things argue thus. If it were anything but righteousness, then it is evil that you do oppose; and then the better you are, the more

you would oppose it. I say, if the thing that you oppose be evil and not good, then the better you are at any time, the more you would oppose it; but inasmuch as the worse you are at any time, the more you do oppose it, that is a sign it is rather good you do oppose than evil. For surely if a man, the worse he grows the more he doth oppose a thing, then we may gather an argument that the thing is rather good than evil that he doth oppose. Nay, consider in your mind thus, it may be when you are in your health and strength and lusty, and have all about you, and are in a tavern and heat with wine, then you scorn, deride, and speak against such and such men; but suppose the hand of God be upon you, suppose you upon your sickbeds, and you apprehend yourselves going the way of all flesh to receive the sentence of your eternal doom from God, are you of the same mind now? Are these men as hateful to you now as they were at such a time when you were in a tavern and spake so against them? Why, surely if you did speak against those men because they were naught, then the nearer you are to answer before God, the more would your hearts be against those men; or if any way were opposed because it was naught, then the nearer you come to be judged before God, the more your hearts would be against that way. But now we find it otherwise, that many men that would not be accounted persecutors of righteousness, yet that that they speak most against, they do it more when their lusts are heat by wine, by meat and drink, or otherwise, in the ruff of their pride, in their strength and health; they do it more then than they would do it upon their sickbeds, when they are going before the Lord to answer. And that is another discovery that, whatever the pretence was, yet it is righteousness that they persecuted.

Thirdly, When men oppose others under pretence of faults that they were more guilty of a great deal before they made the profession of religion and righteousness than now they are, and yet they could bear with them then, but now they cannot.

As, for instance, suppose one should come to make profession of religion more than before. Now your hearts are against them, but how? You will make some pretence that they did some fault, and therefore you oppose them. But I appeal to your consciences, were they not more faulty before they made such profession of religion, and yet you could bear with their faults then? Your consciences tell you that your servants, your children, your wife, was more disobedient then; and yet you could better bear with their faults before their profession than after. Therefore surely it is righteousness that is opposed rather than anything else.

Fourthly, A fourth discovery is this, when men are partial in their opposition, they can stand to it, and will plead for, and not be so severe against others,

though guilty of as great and greater faults. Surely, then, it is righteousness that is opposed, rather than those faults that are pretended.

Fifthly, When men hearing any faults in those that profess religion are glad of them, they are glad that they have that pretence; yea, they do rejoice in it, that they have that pretence against them. Oh, this is an argument that it is righteousness that is hated; for certainly if it were evil that were hated, then if a man that did profess religion should prove to be scandalous, and commit an evil, your hearts would mourn for this; Oh! religion hath got a wound! But now, when you are glad when you hear of such an evil that such a one hath fallen into, that professes religion more than others, your hearts can be merry, this is a sign that it is righteousness that your hearts are against. But if you say you are troubled in the discovery of such a man that hath discovered himself at such a time to be false; if that were so, and your spirits right, then you would mourn and lament for the sin that is committed.

Sixthly, Yea, further, it would be your care to make up the breach that is made in the profession of religion. Oh, such a man hath discovered a falsehood! He was very forward in his profession, but he grew scandalous, and so discovered himself false. Oh, what a blow hath religion got by him! therefore let me labour to make it up, by being the more godly myself. But this is not so in men; and therefore it is righteousness that your hearts are most against, rather than anything else.

Seventhly, And then, when men in their opposition of that that is good shall find that their greatest strength it is from the worst sort of men—that the rout and the refuse of people they will join with them; and were it not for their hopes of having a rout of people to join with them, they would never venture in such a way;—surely in this you had need look to yourselves, for it is righteousness you do oppose.

Eighthly, When men's consciences may tell them that they have by-ends in their opposition; that, if they will examine things according to conscience, their conscience will tell them that their ends are by-ends that they do oppose upon. They say they oppose such and such things, and will not be known that they oppose righteousness. But what are your ends? is it not from some self-respect? Do not you see the times go such a way, and it is that moves you, and you shall get into countenance by this means? Certainly, if false ends do act us, it is not righteousness that is acted by us: 'The wrath of man will not accomplish the righteousness of God; neither will men's corruptions, nor the false ends of men to provide for themselves—it will not accomplish the righteousness of God.

There are divers other evidences that might be given; but I would fain have concluded in a word of exhortation to men to take heed what they do. Many things I had thought to have spoken in a way of exhortation, that men should beware of what they oppose. Examine things thoroughly now; for, my brethren, these are the times wherein Christ is opposing antichrist more than before; and therefore, though Christ was patient towards persecutors in former times, they must not expect that he will be so patient now; for it is a time of pulling down the man of sin. Now Christ is more stirring than he was; we see Christ more acting and stirring. Christ is risen, and if Christ be risen, his enemies must be scattered; and therefore, though in the times that were before much was winked at, but now Christ is risen, and is stirring, and therefore take heed of opposing of that that is good. And further, in these times there is more light and discoveries than before; and there are more professors of religion now than heretofore, and therefore there is more danger of opposing of the saints now than before. And, besides, we are about discovering and searching out of the way of God we did not know before; and what now, in a time of searching after things, and when we come to profess many things

that heretofore we did not profess but were against, why, can we rise to the top presently, so as to fall opposing those that do not the same things that we do? And further, let us consider that England hath been guilty of this sin of persecution of righteousness, truly I think I may say, more than any other kingdom. And we should take heed to ourselves of this, because we have been under persecution ourselves. Yea, we ourselves have made much profession of late more than before, and we have engaged ourselves to the way; and when we have joined ourselves with the saints, and engaged ourselves with them, we had need take heed of persecution. And then, lastly, In these times it is a vain thing to persecute. Why? Because there is so much light discovered, and people, many of them, have not only made profession, but have a work of God upon them, that it is not persecution will prevail now: in Rev. xiv. 13, 'Blessed are they that die in the Lord,' or they that die for the Lord. Write it, from henceforth, saith the Spirit; mark it. Why, flesh and blood would not reason thus, that those that suffer for the Lord are blessed; but 'blessed are they that die in,' or for, the Lord. 'Yea, saith the Spirit.' The judgment of the Spirit is different from the judgment of the world.