

SERMON III.

Ps. CXIX. 92.

“Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.”

NOW I come to speak of the proposition that is clearly held forth in the text,

Doct. 3. That the Word of God delighted in is the afflicted saint's antidote against ruin and destruction: “Unless thy law had been my delights, I should,” &c. The Word of God is the sick saint's salve, the dying saint's cordial, a most precious medicine to keep God's people from perishing in time of affliction. This upheld Jacob from sinking when his brother Esau came furi-

ously marching to destroy him, (Gen. xxxii. 12,) "And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good," &c. The promise of God supported him. This also upheld Joshua, and enabled him courageously to fight the Lord's battles, because God had said He would never leave him nor forsake him, (Josh. i. 5.) Melancthon saith that the Landgrave of Hesse told him at Dresden, that it had been impossible for him to have borne up under the manifold miseries of so long an imprisonment but for the comforts of the Scriptures in his heart.

There are eight things may be said, amongst many other, in commendation of the Word of God:—

1. It is the magazine and storehouse of all comfort and consolation. There is no condition but one that a man can be in, but he may find soul-supporting comfort for it out of the Word. Indeed, if thou resolvest to go on in sin, the Word cannot comfort thee; it threat-

eneth hell and damnation to all such. If the God of heaven can make such miserable, they shall be miserable; but excepting this one, there is no condition so miserable but a man may fetch a cordial out of the Word to support him under it. Art thou as empty of riches, and as full of diseases, as Job under the Old Testament, and Lazarus under the New Testament? Are thy sins, with which thou art willing to part, many and great? Is thy conscience exceedingly wounded and disquieted? Doth the devil roar upon thee with hideous temptations? Let thy condition be never so sad, the Word of God is able to afford thee comfort under it; for it is the Word of that God who is the God of all consolation. There is no kind of true comfort, but here it is to be had,—here are cordials of all sorts: comforts under bodily troubles, and comforts under soul troubles. There is no monarch can furnish his table with such variety

of delicacies as God hath furnished His Word with variety of comforts.

2. The Word of God is not only the magazine of all true comfort, but the fountain from whence it is derived. All the comfort that you receive by reading of good books is fetched out of this book. All the refreshings that the ambassadors of Christ administer to you are borrowed from this fountain. As the king of Israel answered the woman that cried out, saying, "Help, my lord, O king," "If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee?" so will all the true ministers of Christ say to any distressed soul that cries out for comfort: How can we comfort you if the Word of God doth not comfort you? All our comforts must be fetched from thence.

2 Kings vi.
26, 27.

3. It will comfort us at such a time when no outward thing can comfort us; and that is when we are under soul-agonies, and when our soul sits upon our lips ready to depart; when we are

falling into the ocean of eternity, then, even then, the promises of the Word will comfort us, when gold and silver, father and mother, friends and physicians, are miserable comforters,—then will one promise out of the Word fill us full of joy unspeakable and glorious.

4. The comforts of the Word exceed all other comforts, for they are pure and purifying, sure and satisfying; they are soul-supporting, soul-comforting, and soul-ravishing—they are durable and everlasting. The comforts of the world are not worthy to be named that day in which we speak of the comforts of the Word. At best they are but bodily, unsatisfying, and transitory; many times they are sinful and soul-damning.

5. The Word of God is not only a magazine and a fountain of comfort, but also a touchstone by which we must try all our comforts whether they are true and real or no. All joys, hopes, and assurances must be tried by the Word, and if not rightly grounded

thereupon, are false and soul-deluding.

6. It is an apothecary's shop, or a physician's dispensatory, out of which we may fetch all manner of medicines to cure all the diseases of our souls. Art thou spiritually lame, blind, or dumb? &c. The Word will open blind eyes, make the dumb to speak, and the lame to walk. If dead in sins and trespasses, the Word, when it is the sword of the Spirit, will quicken thee: it is as a corrosive to eat sin out of thy heart; therefore David saith, "I have hid thy word in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

7. It is a spiritual armoury, out of which we may fetch all manner of weapons to conquer the devil and his temptations, (2 Cor. x. 4.) It is that little brook out of which every David may fetch five smooth stones to destroy the devil. These five smooth stones are five texts of Scripture—three of these Christ took out of the brook of the Word, by

which he subdued the devil, (Matt. iv. 4, 7, 10.)

8. It is the sun of the Christian world. As the sun is the light of the natural world, and without it the world is but a chaos and a dungeon full of darkness; so is the Word of God the light of the spiritual world, without which a Christian is under an eternal night. Therefore David saith, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path," (Ps. cxix. 105.) What would all the world avail if there were no sun to enlighten it? and what comfort would all the wealth of it afford us if there were no Word to instruct and counsel us? For this is the Christian's compass to sail to heaven by, his staff to walk withal to heaven, his spiritual bladders to keep his soul from drowning, the cork to keep up the net of his soul from sinking. Afflictions are like the lead of the net which weigheth it down; but the Word is as the cork which keeps it up, that it

sinks not. So saith David in the text, "Unless thy law had been my delights," &c.

Use 1. If the Word of God be of such invaluable excellency, absolute necessity, and of such admirable use,

1. Let us bless God exceedingly for revealing His will unto us in the Word. It was a great honour and privilege to the Jews that to them "were committed the oracles of God," (Rom. iii. 2.) And it is our great happiness that we have not only the same oracles of God which they have, but an addition of the New Testament for the clearer discovery of the mysteries of salvation unto us. If God be to be praised for every crumb of bread we eat, much more for giving us His Word, which is the bread of life, and the only food of our souls. Blessed be God, who hath not only given us the book of the creatures and the book of nature to know Himself and His will by, but also, and especially, the book of the Scriptures,

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whereby we come to know those things of God and of Christ which neither the book of nature nor of the creatures can reveal unto us.

Let us bless God, not only for revealing His will in His Word, but for revealing it by writing. Before the time of Moses, God discovered His will by immediate revelations from heaven; "But we have a surer word of prophecy," (2 Pet. i. 19,)—surer to us than a voice from heaven; for the devil saith the apostle, "transforms himself into an angel of light." He hath his apparitions and revelations; he is God's ape, and, in imitation of God, he appears to his disciples, and makes them believe that it is God that appears, and not the devil. Thus he appeared to Saul in the likeness of Samuel. And if God should now at this day discover His way of worship, and His Divine will by revelations, how easily would men be deceived, and mistake diabolical delusions for Divine revelations; and therefore let us

bless God for the written Word, which is surer and safer, as to us, than an immediate revelation. There are some that are apt to think, that if an angel should come from heaven and reveal God's will to them, it would work more upon them than the written Word; but I would have these men study the conference between Abraham and Dives, (Luke xvi. 27-31,) "They have Moses and the prophets;" if they will not profit by them, neither would they profit by any that should come out of hell, or down from heaven to them; for it is the same God that speaks by His written Word, and by a voice from heaven. The difference is only in the outward clothing; and therefore if God's speaking by writing will not amend us, no more will God's speaking by a voice. Oh, bless God exceedingly for the written Word! Let us cleave close to it, and not expect any revelations from heaven of new truths, but say with the apostle, as in Gal. i. 8, 9.

Use 2. Let us prize the Word of God above gold, yea, above fine gold. Let us read it diligently, reverently, praying to God to give us the same Spirit that wrote it to enable us to understand it, and conscientiously to practise it. Let us make it the joy and rejoicing of our heart; and, as it is in the text, let us make it our delights; but of this I speak in the former point. The only motive I shall now use to persuade you to make the Word your delights shall be this in the text, because it will keep you from perishing in the time of your greatest affliction; it will comfort you when you have most need of it—that is, under heart-sinking afflictions, and at the hour of death; and it will comfort you when all outward comforts and creatures fail. It will be food to strengthen your weak faith—physic to cure the remainder of corruption; it will be a cordial to revive your drooping spirits and fainting souls; it will

make you more than conquerors over all temptations and distresses.

But now the great question is how a child of God ought to manage and make use of the Word of God, so as to make it a conduit of support and comfort in the day of his greatest afflictions.

Ans. To be able to do this, there is a great deal of spiritual wisdom and understanding required; for the Word to many people is like Saul's armour to David, which was so cumbersome to him that he could not wear it.

There are many know not how to use the Word so as to be comforted by it. As the woman of Samaria told Christ, (John iv. 11,) "The well is deep, and thou hast nothing to draw with;" so may I say, The Word of God is a deep well, it is a well of salvation, but it is deep, and the deeper the sweeter; but most people want buckets to draw with—they want a spiritual Isa. iv.

art to fetch out of these wells of salvation Divine support and consolation; and therefore to help you in this great work you must know—

The Word of God divided into the commanding, threatening, and promising Word.

That the Word of God may be divided into three parts—into commandments, threatenings, and promises. And though a Christian must not neglect the commanding and threatening word; yet, if ever he would make the Word a channel of Divine comfort, he must study the promising Word; for the promises are a Christian's magna charta for heaven. All comfort must be built upon a Scripture promise, else it is presumption, not true comfort. The promises are the food of faith, and the soul of faith. As faith is the life of a Christian, so the promises are the life of faith: faith is a dead faith, if it hath no promise to quicken it. As the promises are of no use without faith to apply them, so faith is of no use without a promise to lay hold on. And

the great reason why the people of God walk uncomfortably in their afflictions is because they do not chew the promises. They are rare cordials; but as a man cannot taste the sweetness of a cordial unless he chew it, no more can we receive any spiritual refreshment from the promises unless we meditate on them. The promises are as a mine full of rich treasure; but, as mines, unless we dig deep into them, we can never get the gold and silver hid in them, no more can we enjoy the soul-ravishing comfort of the promises, unless we dig into them by a serious consideration of them. They are as a garden full of rare flowers, able to sweeten any condition. But because we do not walk in this garden, and pick-out these flowers, hence it is that we live so disconsolately and dejectedly under our afflictions. There are many rare stories declaring the comfort that some of God's saints have received from the promises in the day of their

distress. Mr Bilney, that blessed martyr, was much wounded in conscience by reason of the great sin he committed in subscribing to Popish errors; but he was much comforted by reading those words, (1 Tim. i. 15,) "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of which I am the chief." Bezā was supported under his troubles by the words of Christ in John x. 27-29. Mr Bolton tells us of one that was upheld under great affliction, and comforted from Isa. xxvi. 3. Of another from Isa. lvii. 15. I knew a young maid that went triumphantly to heaven by the refreshing she found in that well-known text, Matt. xi. 28, and many that have been wonderfully cheered by reading the 8th of the Romans, and by that text, (1 John iii. 14,) "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." The truth is, there is no promise but, if God be pleased to

lighten it, and show us our interest in it, will afford a harvest of joy. It is with promises as it is with sermons—that sermon which once heard, did not at all work upon us, the same sermon heard at another time may exceedingly affect us. And the same text of Scripture which sometimes doth not at all comfort us, may at another time convey much comfort to us. Two men troubled in conscience may both of them read the same chapter, and hear the same sermon, and one of them may have his troubled mind pacified, and the other continue troubled; and the reason is, because the Spirit of God makes the Word effectual to one, and not to the other. How often hath a distressed saint read Matt. xi. 28; 1 Tim. i. 15; John x. 27, 28; Isa. xxvi. 3; lvii. 15; 1 John iii. 14, and found no comfort in reading of them? But if the Spirit of God did come in and open his eyes to behold the rich mercies wrapt up in these promises,

and his interest in them, they would fill him with comfort above expression. And therefore if ever you would make the Word of God God's instrument to convey support and comfort to you in the time of soul-sinking afflictions, you must study the promises, and pray unto God that His Spirit may irradiate them, and show you the fulness of them, and your interest in them.

Quest. How must we improve the promises, so as to make them spiritual bladders, to keep us from being drowned in the deep waters of affliction.

Ans. You must do three things :

Three things to be done by those that would improve the promises.

I. You must make a catalogue of the promises.

II. You must seriously ponder and meditate on them.

III. You must apply them to your own souls as belonging to you in particular.

I. You must make a catalogue of the promises; you must gather them up, as

they lie scattered in the Word, into a spiritual nosegay and bind them together. You must do as they that gather up ends of gold and silver; you must lose none. Every promise is as a ray of gold; as a star in the firmament. And though there are stars of divers magnitudes, differing from one another in glory, yet every star hath its beauty and benefit; so, though some promises are more glorious than others, (like the sun in comparison of the moon,) yet every promise hath its beauty and lustre; and as starlight in a dark night is very comfortable, so in the dark night of affliction every little promise will afford unspeakable comfort to a troubled soul.

To help you in making this catalogue, give me leave to suggest three things :

1. Be sure to make it in time of health. Woe be to those that have their promises to gather when they should make use of them. You that slight the promises in prosperity, shall receive no comfort from them in adversity.

2. Forget not to treasure up all those promises which God hath made to His children in the day of their adversity. As, for example, God hath promised in all our afflictions to be with us, (Isa. xliii. 2,) "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee," &c. He will be with you, to protect and direct you, to support and comfort you. If three saints be put into the fiery furnace, the Son of God will make the fourth, (Dan. iii. 25.)

(1.) God will be afflicted in all our afflictions, (Isa. lxiii. 9.) He suffers in all our sufferings, (Acts ix. 4.)

(2.) He will make our beds in our sickness, (Ps. xli. 2.) He will condescend to the lowest office for our ease and refreshment.

(3.) He will know our souls in adversity, (Ps. xxxi. 7.) He will know us, to pity us, and to succour, and to help us.

(4.) He will keep us from the evil of all afflictions, (Job v. 19.) God hath not promised to keep His people from afflictions, but to keep them from the hurt of them. Though they are not good in themselves, yet he will turn them to our good, (Heb. xii. 10; 1 Cor. xi. 32; Jer. xxiv. 5.) The good figs were carried into captivity for their good. God hath promised that all "things shall work together for our good," (Rom. viii. 28;) not only all ordinances, &c., but all afflictions, &c.

(5.) God hath promised to lay no more upon us than we are able to bear, but either to give us less pain or greater patience, (1 Cor. x. 13.) And though in a little wrath He hid His face from us for a moment, yet with everlasting kindness will He have mercy on us, &c. (Isa. liv. 7, 8.) These, and many such-like promises, will be as so many spiritual cordials to revive our fainting spirits, and as so many pillars to uphold us under the greatest affliction.

3. For the completing of this catalogue, you may make use of many excellent books written for this purpose, wherein you shall have promises of all kinds, both spiritual and temporal, gathered together. Yet let me advise you not to rest satisfied with the collections of others, but when you read the Bible, and meet with a suitable promise with which God is pleased to affect your hearts, take the pains to write it down, and one such promise of your own writing will work more powerfully upon your souls than many others of another's gathering. So much for the first—make a catalogue of the promises.

TO THE READER.

. Reader, this and the following sermon contains a large discourse about the promises, which because it may be thought by some to be impertinent to the text,

and rather a digression from it, than an explication of it, I crave leave to inform thee of two things.

1. That the promises are the principal ground of comfort to a child of God in the day of his adversity. They are his chief city of refuge when all creature-comforts fail ; when he suffers shipwreck of all human props, these are his planks upon which he swims safe to the shore of heaven. All comfort that is not founded upon a promise is delusion, not true consolation. And therefore a discourse about them cannot rationally be interpreted as inapplicable to the text.

2. That there are divers particulars added to the sermons concerning the nature, necessity, excellency, and usefulness of the promises, which were not mentioned in the preaching of them. And if any of them shall appear to be heterogenous to the text, yet if they prove serviceable to heighten the esteem of the promises, and to quicken thee to

a more serious and frequent meditation on them, and application of them, I hope thou art not at all injured; and I may justly desire that thou wouldst not be offended.

It is reported of St Austin, in his life written by Possidius, that by a digression in one of his sermons from his text, he converted a heretic from his erroneous opinion. If any passage in these two sermons prove useful to turn thee from thy sinful negligence, and to awaken thee to a more diligent study of the precious promises, I shall account it a happy and blessed digression. For herein especially consisteth the difference between a religious Christian and a moral man: a moral man will abstain from the outward acts of sin; but he knows not what it is to live upon promises; he never tasted any sweetness in a promise; he lives upon creatures, not upon promises; and therefore when creatures fail, his heart sinks like a stone, and he is at his wits' end and faith's

end. But a religious Christian lives upon promises, and not upon creatures; and therefore when creatures fail, he hath the promises to live on; he labours to taste the sweetness that is in them. He lives upon promises, when providence seems to run cross to promises. They are his fiery chariot, to carry him up to heaven. If, then, these ensuing sermons inflame thy affections with a greater love to the promises, and a greater care to meditate on them, and to get an interest in them, thou hast cause to bless God, and to pray for

Thy unworthy servant in Christ,

EDM. CALAMY.