

SERMONS PREACHED AT A COMMUNION IN
IRVINE.

SERMON I.

AT A HUMILIATION BEFORE THE COMMUNION.

ZEPHANIAH III. 1, 2.

“1. Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, woe to the robbing city!

“2. She heard not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God.”

To bring Jerusalem to repentance, the prophet is sent forth to denounce woe and wrath against it. He charges Jerusalem with seven iniquities; three of them against the law, and four against the gospel, or offer of mercy.

The first sin against the law he charges the city with, is gluttony, for he says, “Woe to thee, filthy;” or rather (as the original has it) the gluttonous or gorb.* city; for the word that is here used, is borrowed from the crop of a fowl, or the gut-pock of a fish: whereby he reproveth all sort of pleasure-taking in pampering of the body in meat, drink, gorgeous apparel, unlawful lusts, and intemperance. The next

* Voracious.

sin against the law, is their profaning and abusing of religion, the handling of holy things with unhal-
lowed hands; and therefore he calls them a polluted
or profane city. The third sin he lays to their charge,
is oppression;—deceiving one another, greedy ex-
torting, and taking vantage one of another; therefore
he calls them the oppressing city.

Their sins against the gospel or offer of mercy were
these: First, The not obeying of the Lord's voice;
for when the Lord sent his messengers to them, ris-
ing up early, and sending his servants the prophets
to them, and told them their faults, they obeyed not
the Lord's voice. The next sin against the offer of
mercy, is their not receiving of correction, not amend-
ing of their life, by the Lord's fatherly rods. Their
third sin against the offer of mercy, is that when the
Lord made fair promises and gracious, they trusted
him not, and cared not for his promises. Their fourth
sin against the offer of mercy was, that the Lord drew
near to them, but they refused to have communion
with him; they would not draw near to him. Which
sins against the law and offer of mercy, when they
are joined together, are layed forth here as the just
reasons of the denouncing woe—woe for gluttony, woe
for profaning God's ordinances, woe for injury to
their neighbour, woe for not obeying God's voice,
woe for not amending by corrections, woe for not
trusting in God, and woe for not drawing near him.

Against what place or people is this woe denounced?
It is against Jerusalem, the holy city, the joy of the
whole earth, the place of God on earth, the place of
his habitation, of which he said, "This is the place
of my rest for ever;"—the place where his laws and
holy ordinances were taught and administrated; the

place where God was most glorified, where the most holy people were, and means to make men holy. Yet this city is charged with these seven faults :

1. With gluttony, for the prophet says, They drank their wine in bowls, they stretched themselves upon their beds of ivory, they sang unto viol and harp, and remembered not the affliction of Joseph ; they neighed after their neighbours' wives, as fed horses ; their eyes were full of adultery, their eyes were as windows to draw in whorish objects, they denied to themselves no unclean pleasures. 2. And for regard of God's holy ordinances, who but they?—for they gathered daily to the temple, offered their sacrifices, feasted before the Lord, and came to all the solemnities of the Lord's worship, and cried out, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we!" Yet here they are called polluted ; their prayers, praises, sacrifices, hearing of the law, feasts, fasts, sabbath, whatever they meddled with are defiled. 3. They are charged with oppression in overreaching their neighbours, either by scant measure, false weight, unrighteous dealing, every one seeking a kinsh* of his neighbour ; therefore the prophet says, "Let not a brother trust in a brother, for every brother will supplant." They wronged one another either in body, goods, or good name, and he who might be most master overthrew his neighbour. Then these former sins are aggravated by eiking-to other four sins : 1. Disobeying of the advertisements of God's word—as if the Lord had said, I have no wyte† of their faults, neither I nor my servants ; for I told them their faults, directed them what they should do, and enjoined them to cease from profanity. 2.

* Twist or wrench—an unfair advantage.

† Blame.

And besides directions, I have not spared sufficient rods, whereby they might well have known that I was angry at their faults: but for all my rods, they are never a whit the better. Whereto then should I strike them more? they will revolt still: albeit I make them sick with smiting, yet they will not return to me. 3. And yet farther to allure them to repent and turn in, I have made them many a fair promise; but they have neither believed me, nor judged me faithful, but counted me one who had said more than I was minded to perform. 4. And when yet I desired to cultivate their kindness, and drew warmly to them, fluttered over them, and gathered them in, as a hen doth her chickens under her wings, yet they would not; therefore woe unto them! Now, what a woe is this? It is not like man's woe, for when a man says "woe" unto himself, he acknowledges his desert; takes with his fault and deserved punishment, that he may eschew. But this woe is God's woe, even the broad curse of God, the terrifying curse of God, the woe that Christ denounced against the Scribes and Pharisees. This woe is the full vial of God's wrath, the malediction of God, the great curse of God, that cleaves to them for their pollution, profanity, oppression, and not obeying of God's voice. Let us make use of this.

DOCTRINE 1. This woe is denounced against Jerusalem, who thought no such thing her due, neither knew herself to be in so miserable a case, neither would take with it; and therefore the prophet Zephaniah must be sent with this message unto them, to tell them of their sin and misery, and charge them with it: for they thought they but used the creatures as they had liberty; and for God's ordinances, they

were diligent enough in the use of them ; and for their neighbours, they thought they but used them according to the law. Of this we learn, that they who profess themselves to be the people of God, may be lying in many gross sins, and yet pleasing themselves with their own estate ; not afraid of woe, nor aware of it, when it is very near hand them—as the kirks of Asia knew not their estate, till Christ caused write epistles to their ministers, and bade tell Ephesus that she was fallen from her first love ; Sardis, that she was a dead kirk, albeit she had a name that she was living ; Laodicea, that she was lukewarm, while as she thought herself rich and increased in all spiritual graces, and had need of nothing, when she was both poor, miserable, blind, and naked. For this cause the prophet is bidden lift up his voice like a trumpet, and tell Israel their sins, and Jacob their transgressions.

Seeing people may be lying under a sevenfold curse and not know of it, beware lest ye be blessing and securing yourselves as if all were well, when the curse and judgment of God is at hand. Agree with thy adversary quickly, lest he deliver thee to the judge, and thou be cast in prison, there to lie till thou pay the uttermost farthing. Examine matters well, because the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ; who can know it ? There is no man will die on his own assize ; for if men say their prayers morning and evening, keep the kirk and solemn meetings, and can bide an inquest of their neighbours, they think all is well. But we may lie very near such persons ; therefore search yourselves, O nation not worthy to be beloved, lest ye be deceived, and carried on into a fool's paradise, trowing that all is right, when God shall ding you over the

stair of presumption. See then that ye be not hood-winked, and blindly led on to hell. Know what is your case; for it is a sore matter to be lying under wrath and at feud with God, and not to know it; to be dodged at the heels with heavy judgments, and not to be aware of it; and to have the spait* of the Lord's fury coming over a high hill, running towards that road ye are walking in, to sweep you away ere ye perceive it. In time then examine yourself, and be wise.

DOCT. 2. We see it is God who knows Jerusalem's works, who censures them; which lets us see that it is not experience, or the conceit and estimation of the country, or the opinion that men have of themselves, that is the rule whereby God will have men tried; but he himself will judge men according to their works. Therefore He says to Laodicea, "I know thy works;" and in all these epistles, he takes a stile to himself, whereby he shews that his censure is according to the truth. He is the "Amen," and the "Faithful Witness;" his eyes "are as flaming fire;" and therefore he sends out his reproofs as men's dispositions require.

Seeing men's estate is not to be judged by their own estimation or by others', but according to the Lord's censure, let all try their carriage by that which he says of them in his word, and all the exercises of his worship. Speir at thy prayer, what devotion is in thee, and it will say, that thy prayers are so coldrife, that they cannot pierce up to heaven. Speir at thy conversation among men, what is thy estate, and it will tell thee it is coldrife, stubborn, implacable, cankered, unmerciful, and has a heart that cannot repent. Speir

* Flood.

what love thou hast to God, and it will be told thee, thou can hear his name dishonoured, and care little for it; and thou cares not much how thy children and servants grow in knowledge, or fear of God. And if thy deeds speak thus, why art thou so secure? Why blessest thou thyself, when thy manners say, that the world is more in thy mind than heaven? when the account-book is more perused than the Bible? when the debts that are owing thee are more in thy mind, than the debts that thou art owing to God? What is the cause thou can comport with this estate? It is because Satan has no will that the dyvour* read over the account-book, or the sinner examine his deeds; and men have no will their deeds be brought to the light, but hate the light because it reproves them. Or if the minister point at their faults, "Oh!" say they, "some men have told him yon of me; or he suspects me." But learn ye to examine yourselves as ye shall answer to God, and as ye would be set free that day when he shall judge the secrets of all hearts. Let not the complaint the Lord makes be made of you, "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done" (Jer. viii. 6). Therefore every one of you speir at yourself, whereon your fear, love, care, grief, pleasure is most set; and if not on God, ye have reason to suspect yourself.

DOCT. 3. We see it is Jerusalem, the holy city, that is threatened; even the city which the Lord had raised out from among all the nations under heaven, to place his name there and privilege, above all others. It lets us see, that no profession or privilege external will save a people from woe, if they lie in any known

* Bankrupt.

sin. Say not, "We have Abraham to our father; for out of these stones, God can raise up children to Abraham." Say not, "The temple of the Lord are we." Say not, We have the Bible, God's oracles, the truth truly preached; for all these privileges are nought, except ye amend your manners. What is it that Christ has a kirk here, a candlestick erected, a daily covered table with bread, a laver to wash in, if use be not made of these? Doubtless they shall draw on deeper curses, except ye study to approve your hearts to God in secret, and order your conversation among men. If this ye do not, God shall draw you out among hypocrites; he shall tirr* the visorne off your faces, and shew your rottenness to man and angel. Are ye dearer to God than Ephesus, Corinth, Laodicea, Jerusalem, whom he overthrew for the abuse of their privileges? If he has done so to the green tree, what will he do to the withered? If such fair towns and countries have been thrown down, let not the sandy hillock of Irvine think to be spared; but that your frequent communions, preachings, and solemn meetings, shall draw on hotter wrath, except ye mend your manners. Your fair profession, coming to hear, and all your discharging outwardly of the exercises of God's worship, shall not save you from the judgments threatened from this place, except ye labour to be inwardly, that which ye make show of openly. If ye believe this, ye would take no rest till a new course were intended.

Let us come to particulars in the text :

1. "Woe to the filthy city."—This challenge for gluttony lets us see, that God requires sobriety and temperance of his people; that they would study to be masters over their lusts, and obtain victory over

* Strip.

their appetites, and that the love of their belly make them not miscarry. Take heed lest at any time ye be oppressed with surfeiting, drunkenness, and the cares of this life, lest Christ come on you, like a thief in the night. At no time give your belly the will; drink not whereby your wits may be made to totter, let be to be beastly; study to sobriety. If ye had to do to speak to some great man, ye would be loath to drink mickle for marring of your wits. Far more, seeing ye are called to be the temples of the Holy Ghost, should ye not possess your vessels in holiness, and be moderate in meat, drink, and apparel? As pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, for the Lord allows enough that is lawful; why then should not unlawful things be spared? Therefore be moderate, and more given to feed and clothe the soul, than the body; to seek to do God's will, than your own.

2. We see that sin in man may so prevail, as to make man unclean, intemperate, and immoderate; and where this uncleanness and intemperance is, WOE is annexed to it. Woe to the gluttonous person who has a crop for all, and ingurgitates every thing! Woe to him who pleases himself, and fulfils his lusts, whose appetites make him draw on sin! The poor man will say, Where get I to waste or use intemperately? I answer, Thou moderatest in nothing if thou may get it; it is want of money makes thee spare, and when thou hast, thou usest it intemperately: thou art intemperate, who art discontent with thy estate, and would have more than God allows, and takest in more than enough when thou may spare it. Therefore, woe unto thee; fye upon these appetites that draw on the curse of God on soul and body! Woe to the unclean person, the fornicator, and adulterer! Woe to thee,

who art given to force and pamper thy belly ! Woe to the drunkard and tippler ! Woe to thee who art given to fleshly ease of body to the hurt of thy soul ! Woe to thee that art given to fleshly delights, contenting thyself with the sow's happiness, and despising the pearl hid in the field !

“ To the polluted.”—This woe against the profaners of religion and exercises of God's worship, lets us see that religion should be kept pure and clean, both for the matter and manner of it : it should be holily handled, the heart within being holy as the external carriage. This people thought the frequenting of religious exercises was enough to mend all their faults ; that the offering of incense and sacrifices appointed under the law, cleansed all their faults—as those men who now glut themselves in all sorts of sin, and come to the communion, thinking that a respite for all by-gones. But God calls such persons, profaners of religion. So then, when men lead an evil life, and amend not their manners, let them meddle with never so holy ordinances, they profane all. The unchaste, the intemperate, the malicious, the greedy, or the man that is given to any known sin, whatever point of religion he puts his hand to, he pollutes it, (Haggai ii. 14). He speirs, what if the unholy touch a holy thing, will the holy make the unholy clean ? no, but the unholy defiles the holy. And so they who are lying in sin, and come to preachings, prayers, fasts, communions, they defile all ; for to the unbelieving man, every thing is unclean, even his mind and his conscience are defiled. And to thee who pollutes all God's ordinances, woe is pronounced against thee : woe to thee for coming to preachings, prayers, communions ! If then thy coming to God's ordinances

make thee not better, they make thee worse: therefore study to be purged from every known sin, lest thou profane holy exercises; and that thou hast profaned them, ask mercy; run to the fountain, lest thou be casten out as an unclean thing.

“Woe to the oppressing city.”—This denouncing of woe against oppression, shews that God requires equitable and righteous dealing of neighbour with neighbour; that none should injure one another, but that men should live blamelessly and holy, under a holy Lawgiver. Here, is not only open oppression, but all sorts of injury, even that which is done under pretence of laws, forbidden. And where sin and temptation so prevail, as injuries mutual are done, there, woe is annexed. Therefore covet not that which is thy neighbours; deceive him not in weight, measure, price, bargain, neither take any unrighteous vantage; neither wrong thy neighbour in any sort, else woe to thee!

And now follow the sins against the mercies of God: “She obeyed not the voice,” (verse 2). This challenge for not obeying of the Lord’s voice, lets us see, that God uses not to condemn or denounce woe against a people, till first he have dealt with them in the voice of the word, in the mouths of his ministers and servants; albeit he uses not to warn those without the kirk, but by the voice of his creatures, the sun, the moon, summer, winter, fruitful seasons, and works of creation; and if they be not made wise by these, he cuts them off. But when his kirk fails, he warns them by the voice of his servants: he will do nothing, till he reveal it to his servants the prophets; God strikes not his people, till he warn them by his ministers; he quarrels them, threatens, and

denounces woe, ere he bring it on. Tak tent* when ye hear your faults rebuked by the word, for the Lord will next debate the matter with rods. Wrath has been denounced from this place against all your sins ; therefore repent, and read out your own dittay:† indict yourselves before God, and reckon what ye have done in secret and openly : challenge yourselves in time, lest the threatened wrath overtake you.

We see here, albeit it be God's fashion to warn ere he strike, yet when warning is refused, the sin is the greater, and the woe is the heavier. He that hears his sin reprov'd, and hearkens not to the voice of the Lord to mend it, his sin is the greater, and woe the heavier. His sin and woe are bound on him by a double hand ; once because he sinned, another time because he was warn'd and went on—therefore a double woe.

“ Received not correction.”—We see that God with his word, useth to join his rod ; before he come on with his great judgments, he useth his fatherly rod. But when rods and corrections are not made use of, the sin is greater, and the woe is doubled.

APPLICATION TO IRVINE visited with many rods.—If when ye have been corrected in body, name, goods, souls, and have not mended, know that your sin is double, and your woe is double. As for thee who art corrected, and the dinneling‡ of the rod is yet in the flesh, and art studying to amend, I will not say that woe abides thee. But if thou hast been corrected, and art not like to amend, thou hast to fear that the axe is laid to the root of the tree, and thou shalt be cut down, and cast into the fire. A sore matter for a sinner to be corrected, and yet to go

* Take heed. † Charge, indictment. ‡ Tingling.

light-farrand* under it; that he will have his pleasure, strike God as he likes! Woe to that sinner!

“She trusted not in the Lord.”—This lets us see, that God uses to take an assay of his people by fair means, promises, and offers of mercy, goodness, and bounty, that they may put their trust in him; but when promises of grace to the soul, and benefits to the body prevail not, the sin is the more, and the woe doubled. How many promises have ye heard, and yet are not allured to trust in God, and to love him? Know therefore, that refused promises multiply woes.

“She drew not near to her God.”—This lets us see, that the Lord useth, besides the sending of his word, rods, and promises, to offer himself and his goodness, really and warmly to handle them by his benefits, comforts, and good deeds of all sorts. But when people refuse this communion with God, and give him not a kindly meeting, their sin is doubled, and so is the woe. God has drawn near you by his benefits and comforts of all sorts: look whether ye have drawn near him or no, and sought his kindness, or if ye have despised to seek fellowship with him. If so be, your sin and woe are doubled. Compare the two verses, and we see, the last four challenges are for the abuse of mercy, when there are but three challenges for the breach of the law—which lets us see, that the abuse of mercy deserves woe and heavier challenges, than the breach of the law. Filthiness, profanity, oppression, blasphemy, are great sins; but not obeying the voice of the Lord, not receiving correction, not trusting, and not drawing near to God, are greater sins, because the former are only breaches of the law, when the latter, are

* With levity.

abuse and contempt of the remedy of the breach of the law.

That God challenges both for the breach of the law and abuse of mercy, we see, that the breach of the law and abuse of mercy go always together. If a professor sin against the one, needs must he sin against the other. When thy conscience challenges, it will challenge for both. But especially it will challenge for abuse of the gospel. It is said, that God shall come in flaming fire, and take vengeance on them that obey not the gospel, (2 Thess. i. 8). The gospel commands to believe and repent: when this is disobeyed, God is mistrusted, and his offer of mercy despised; therefore the sin of professors is greater than the sin of Sodom. Lastly, if these seven sins be causes of woe, then the doing of the contrair, is eschewing of woe. If woe abides the intemperate glutton, then no woe to the temperate who give not their flesh the will. If woe be to the polluter of God's worship, then reverend using of the Lord's ordinances delivers from woe. If woe be to the oppressor, then no woe to the meek, courteous, equitable dealer. If woe to not obeying God's voice, then hearing of the Lord's voice, taking with correction, trusting in God, and drawing near him, deliver both from the sin and woe.

That thou may eschew this woe, hearken to the voice of the preacher; hear the sound of the rod, and Him that appointed it. Believe God's goodness, and receive his offers of mercy, and say with David, It is good for me to draw near to thee: I will seek fellowship with thee; that joy, peace, and refreshment which are to be found in thee: I will draw near thee in the use of all the means, that I may be free of this woe.