

conscience to draw the conclusion, and make application, than to do it yourselves; it is possible they may ponder your words in their hearts, as Mary did Christ's, Luke ii. 49, 51. And would you but back all this with your earnest cries to heaven for them, and your own daily example, that they may have nothing from yourselves to retort upon you; and thus wait with patience for the desired effect: O what blessed instruments might you be of their everlasting good!

Inf. 3. To conclude, Let those that have such children as fear the Lord, and endeavour to imitate Christ in those duties, account them a singular treasure and heritage from the Lord, and give them all due encouragement to their duties.

How many have no children at all, but are as a dry tree! and how many have such as are worse than none? The very reproach and heart breaking of their parents, that bring down their hoary heads with sorrow to the grave.

If God have given you the blessing of godly children, you can never be sufficiently sensible of, or thankful for such a favour. O that ever God should honour you to bring forth children for heaven! what a comfort must this be to you, whatever other troubles you meet with abroad, when you come home among godly relations, that are careful to sweeten your own family to you by their obedience! especially, what a comfort is it, when you come to die, that you leave them within the covenant, entitled to Christ, and so need not be anxious how it shall be with them when you are gone? Take heed of discouraging or damping such children from whom so much glory is like to rise to God, and so much comfort to yourselves. Thus let Christ's pattern be improved, who went before you in such eminent holiness, in all his relations, and left you an example that you should follow his steps.



SERMON XXXII.

The third of CHRIST's last Words upon the Cross, illustrated.

LUKE xxiii. 43.

And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, to-day thou shalt be with me in paradise.

IN this scripture you have the third excellent saying of Christ upon the cross, expressing the riches of free grace to the penitent thief; a man that had spent his life in wickedness, and for

his wickedness was now to lose his life. His practice had been vile and profane, but now his heart was broken for it; he proves a convert, yea, the first fruits of the blood of the cross. In the former verse he manifests his faith, "Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom." In this Christ manifests his pardon and gracious acceptance of him; "Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." In which promise are considerable, the matter of it, the person to whom it is made, the time set for its performance, and the confirmation of it for his full satisfaction.

First, The matter or substance of the promise made by Christ, viz. That *he shall be with him in paradise.* By paradise he means heaven itself, which is here shadowed to us by a place of delight and pleasure. This is the receptacle of gracious souls, when separated from their bodies. And that paradise signifies heaven itself, and not a third place, as some of the fathers fondly imagine, is evident from 2 Cor. xii. 2, 4. where the apostle calls the same place by the names of the third heaven, and the paradise. This is the place of blessedness designed for the people of God. So you find, Rev. ii. 7. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God;" i. e. to have the fullest and most intimate communion with Jesus Christ in heaven. And this is the substance of Christ's promise to the thief: Thou, i. e. thou in spirit, or thou in the noblest part, thy soul which here bears the image of the whole person; "Thou shalt be with me in paradise."

Secondly, The person to whom Christ makes this excellent and glorious promise: it was to one that had lived lewdly and profanely; a very vile and wretched man, in all the former part of his time, and, for his wickedness, now justly under condemnation; yea, to one that had reviled Christ, after that sentence was executed on him. However, now at last the Lord gave him a penitent believing heart. Now, almost at the last gasp, he is soundly, in an extraordinary way converted; and, being converted, he owns and professes Christ amidst all the shame and reproach of his death; vindicates his innocency, and humbly supplicates for mercy; "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

Thirdly, The set time for the performance of this gracious promise: *To-day*, this very day, shalt thou be with me in glory: Not after the resurrection, but immediately from the time of thy dissolution, thou shalt enjoy blessedness. And here I cannot but detect the cheat of those that deny an immediate state of glory to believers after death; who, (to the end this scripture might not stand in full opposition to their, as uncomfortable, as unsound opinion),

loose the whole frame of it, by drawing one pin, yea, by transposing but a comma, putting it at the word *day*, which should be at the word *thee*; and so reading it thus, “Verily I say unto thee to-day,” referring the word *day* to the time that Christ made the promise, and not to the time of its performance. But if such a liberty as this be yielded, what may not men make the scriptures speak? There can be no doubt, but Christ, in this expression, fixes the time for his happiness; “To-day thou shalt be with me.”

Fourthly, and lastly, You have here the confirmation and seal of this most comfortable promise to him, with Christ’s solemn asseveration; “Verily I say unto thee.” Higher security cannot be given. I that am able to perform what I promise, and have not out-promised myself; for heaven and the glory thereof, are mine: I that am faithful and true to my promises, and have never forfeited my credit with any; I say it, I solemnly confirm it; “Verily I say unto thee, to-day thou shalt be with me in paradise.” Hence we have three plain obvious truths, for our instruction and consolation.

Doct. 1. *That there is a future eternal state, into which souls pass at death.*

Doct. 2. *That all believers are, at their death, immediately received into a state of glory and eternal happiness.*

Doct. 3. *That God may, though he seldom doth, prepare men for this glory, immediately before their dissolution by death.*

These are the useful truths resulting from this remarkable word of Christ to the penitent thief. We will consider and improve them in the order proposed.

Doct. 1. *That there is a future eternal state, into which souls pass at death.*

This is a principal foundation-stone to the hopes and happiness of souls. And seeing our hopes must needs be as their foundation and ground work is, I shall briefly establish this truth by these five arguments. The being of a God evinces it. The scriptures of truth plainly reveal it. The consciences of all men have presentiments of it. The incarnation and death of Christ is but a vanity without it; and the immortality of human souls plainly discovers it.

Arg. 1. *The being of a God undeniably evinces a future state for human souls after this life.* For, if there be a God who rules the world which he hath made, he must rule it by rewards and punish-

ments, equally and righteously distributed to good and bad; putting a difference betwixt the obedient and disobedient, the righteous and the wicked. To make a species of creatures capable of a moral government, and not to rule them at all, is to make them in vain, and is inconsistent with his glory, which is the last end of all things. To rule them, but not suitably to their natures, consists not with that infinite wisdom from which their beings proceeded, and by which their workings are ruled and ordered. To rule them, in a way suitably to their natures, viz. by rewards and punishments, and not to perform, or execute them at all, is utterly incongruous with the veracity and truth of him that cannot lie: this were to impose the greatest cheat in the world upon men, and can never proceed from the holy and true God. So then, as he hath made a rational sort of creatures, capable of moral government by rewards and punishments; so he rules them in that way which is suitable to their natures, promising "it shall be well with the righteous, "and ill with the wicked." These promises and threatenings can be no cheat, merely intended to scare and fright, where there is no danger, or encourage where there is no real benefit; but what he promises, or threatens, must be accomplished, and every word of God take place and be fulfilled. But it is evident that no such distinction is made by the providence of God (at least ordinarily and generally) in this life; but *all things come alike to all; and as with the righteous, so with the wicked.* Yea, here it goes ill with them that fear God; they are oppressed; they receive their evil things, and wicked men their good; therefore we conclude, the righteous Judge of the whole earth, will, in another world, recompense to every one according as his work shall be.

Arg. 2. *Secondly*, And as the very being of God evinces it, so *the scriptures of truth plainly reveal it.* These scriptures are the *pandect*, or *system* of the laws, for the government of man; which the wise and holy Ruler of the world hath enacted and ordained for that purpose. And in them we find promises made to the righteous, of a full reward for all their obedience, patience, and sufferings in the next life or world to come; and threatenings, made against the wicked, of eternal wrath and anguish, as the just recompence of their sin in hell for ever, Rom. ii. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. "Thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, "and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will "render to every man according to his deeds: to them who, by "patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, "and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of "man that doeth evil, &c." So 2 Thess. i. 4, 5, 6, 7. "So that

“ we ourselves glory in you, in the churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure : which is (a manifest token) of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which ye also suffer ; seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you : and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, &c.” To these plain testimonies, multitudes might be added, if it were needful. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but these words shall never pass away.

Arg. 3. *Thirdly*, As the scriptures reveal it, so *the consciences of all men have some presentiments of it*. Where is the man whose conscience never felt any impressions of hope, or fear, from a future world? If it is said, these may be but the effects and force of discourse, or education ; we have read such things in the scriptures, or have heard it by preachers ; and so raise up to ourselves hopes and fears about it. I demand, how the consciences of the Heathens, who have neither scriptures nor preachers, came to be impressed with these things? Doth not the apostle tell us, Rom. ii. 15. “ That their consciences in the mean while work upon these things ? ” their thoughts, with reference to a future state, *accuse*, or *else excuse*, i. e. their hearts are cheered and encouraged by the good they do, and terrified with fears about the evils they commit. Whereas, if there were no such things, conscience would neither accuse nor excuse for good or evil done in this world.

Arg. 4. *Fourthly*, *The incarnation and death of Christ, are but a vanity without it*. What did he propose to himself, or what benefit have we by his coming, if there be no such future state? Did he take our nature, and suffer such terrible things in it for nothing ! If you say, Christians have much comfort from it in this life : I answer, the comforts they have are raised by faith and expectation of the happiness to be enjoyed, as the purchase of his blood, in heaven. And if there be no such heaven to which they are appointed, no hell from which they are redeemed, they do but comfort themselves with a fable, and bless themselves with a thing of nought : their comfort is no greater than the comfort of a beggar, that dreams he is a king, and when he awakes, finds himself a beggar still. Surely the ends of Christ’s death were to deliver us from the wrath to come, 1 Thess. i. 10. not from an imaginary, but a real hell, to bring us to God, 1 Pet. iii. 18. to be the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him, Heb. v. 9.

Arg. 5. *Fifthly* and lastly, *The immortality of human souls, puts it beyond all doubt*. The soul of man, vastly differs from that of a

beast, which is but a material form, and so wholly depending on, that it must need perish with matter. But it is not so with us : Ours are reasonable spirits, that can live and act in a separated state from the body, Eccles. iii. 21. “ Who knoweth the spirit of man, “ that goeth upward ; and the spirit of a beast, that goeth downward to the earth ? ” For if a man dispute whether man be rational, this his very disputing it proves him to be so : so our disputes, hopes, fears, and apprehensions of eternity, prove our souls immortal, and capable of that state.

Inference 1. Is there an eternal state, into which souls pass after this life ? *How precious then is present time, upon the improvement whereof that state depends.* O what a huge weight hath God hanged upon a small wire ! God hath set us here in a state of trial : “ According as we improve these few hours, so will it fare with us “ to all eternity *.” Every day, every hour, nay, every moment of your present time hath an influence into your eternity. Do you believe this ? What ! and yet squander away precious time so carelessly, so vainly ! How do these things consist ? When Seneca heard one promise to spend a week with a friend that invited him, to recreate himself with him ; he told him, he admired he should make such a rash promise ! What (said he) cast away so considerable a part of your life ? How can you do it ? Surely, our prodigality in the expence of time, argues we have but little sense of great eternity.

Inference 2. *How rational are all the difficulties, and severities of religion, which serve to promote and secure a future eternal happiness ?* So vast is the disproportion betwixt time and eternity, things seen, and not seen as yet, the present vanishing, and future permanent state, that he can never be justly reputed a wise man, that will not let go the best enjoyment he hath on earth, if it stand in the way of his eternal happiness. Nor can that man ever escape the just censure of notorious folly, who, for the gratifying of his appetite and present accommodation of his flesh, lets go an eternal glory in heaven. Darius repented heartily that he lost a kingdom for a draught of water ; O, said he, “ for how short a pleasure have I sold a kingdom ! ” It was Moses’ choice, and his choice argued his wisdom ; he chose rather “ to suffer afflictions with the people “ of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin, which are but for a “ season,” Heb. xi. 25. Men do not account him a fool, that will adventure a penny, upon a probability to gain ten thousand pounds. But sure the disproportion betwixt time and eternity is much greater.

Inf. 3. If there certainly be such an eternal state into which souls

* *Ab hoc momento pendet æternitas.*

pass immediately after death ; *How great a change then doth death make upon every man and woman ?* O what a serious thing is it to die ! It is your passage out of the swift river of time, into the boundless and bottomless ocean of eternity. You that now converse with sensible objects, with men and women like yourselves, enter then into the world of spirits. You that now see the continual revolutions of days and nights, passing away one after another, will then be fixed in a perpetual NOW. O what a serious thing is death ! You throw a cast for eternity when you die. If you were to cast a die for your natural life, O ! how would your hand shake with fear, how it would fall ! But what is that to this ?

The souls of men are, as it were, asleep now in their bodies ; at death they awake, and find themselves in the world of realities. Let this teach you, both how to carry yourselves towards dying persons when you visit them ; and to make every day some provision for that hour yourselves. Be serious, be plain, be faithful with others that are stepping into eternity ; be so with your own souls every day. O remember what a long word, what an amazing thing eternity is ! especially considering,

Doct. 2. That all believers are, at their death, immediately received into a state of glory and eternal happiness.

This day shalt thou be with me.

This the Atheist denies : He thinks he shall die, and therefore resolves to live as the beasts that perish. Beryllus, and some others after him, taught, that there was indeed a future state of happiness and misery for souls, but that they pass not into it immediately upon death and separation from the body, but shall sleep till the resurrection, and then awake and enter into it. But is not that soul asleep, or worse, that dreams of a sleeping soul till the resurrection ? Are souls so wounded and prejudiced by their separation from the body, that they cannot subsist or act separate from it ? Or have they found any such conceit in the scriptures ? Not at all. The scriptures take notice of no such interval ; but plainly enough denies it, 2 Cor. v. 8. “ We are confident, I say, and “ willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the “ Lord.” Mark it, no sooner parted from the body, but present with the Lord. So Phil. i. 23. “ I desire to be dissolved, and to “ be with Christ, which is far better.” If his soul was to sleep till the resurrection, how was it far better to be dissolved, than to live ? Sure Paul’s state in the body had been far better than his state after death, if this were so ; for here he enjoyed much sweet

communion with God by faith, but then he should enjoy nothing.

To confirm this dream, they urge, John xiv. 3. "If I go away, I will come again, and receive you to myself." As if the time of Christ's receiving his people to himself, should not come, until his second coming at the end of the world. But though he will then collect all believers into one body, and present them solemnly to his Father; yet that hinders not, but he may, as indeed he doth, receive every particular believing soul to himself at death, by the ministry of angels. And if not, how is it that when Christ comes to judgment, he is attended with ten thousand of his saints, that shall follow him when he comes from heaven? Jude 14. You see then the scripture puts no interval betwixt the dissolution of a saint, and his glorification: It speaks of the saints that are dead, as already with the Lord: And the wicked that are dead, as already in hell, calling them *spirits in prison*, 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20. assuring us, that Judas went presently to his *own place*, Acts i. 25. And to that sense, is the parable of Dives and Lazarus, Luke xvi. 22.

But let us weigh these four things more particularly, for our full satisfaction in this point.

Arg. 1. *First*, Why should the happiness of believers be deferred, since they are immediately capable of enjoying it, as soon as separated from the body? Alas, the soul is so far from being assisted by the body (as it is now) for the enjoyment of God; that it is either clogged or hindered by it: So speaks the apostle, 2 Cor. v. 6, 8. "Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord;" i. e. our bodies prejudice our souls, obstruct and hinder the fulness and freedom of their communion: When we part from the body, we go home to the Lord! then the soul is escaped as a bird out of a cage or snare. Here I am prevented by an excellent pen, * which hath judiciously opened this point: To whose excellent observations I only add this; That if the entanglements, snares, and prejudices of the soul are so great and many in its embodied estate, that it cannot so freely dilate itself and take in the comforts of God by communion with him, then surely the laying aside of that clog, or the freeing of the soul from that burden, can be no bar to its greater happiness, which it enjoys in its separated state.

Arg. 2. *Secondly*, Why should the happiness and glory of the soul be deferred, unless God had some farther preparative work to do upon it, before it be fit to be admitted into glory? But surely, there is no such work wrought upon it after its separation by

* Mr. Shaw in his Farewell to Life.

death: all that is done of that kind, is done here. When the *compositum* is dissolved, all means, duties, and ordinances are ceased. The working day is then ended, and night comes, when no man can work, John ix. 3. To that purpose are those words of Solomon, Eccles. ix. 10. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might; for there is no wisdom, nor knowledge, nor device in the grave whither thou goest." So that our glorification is not deferred, in order to our fuller preparation for glory. If we are not fit when we die, we can never be fit: all is done upon us that ever was intended to be done; for they are called, Heb. xii. 23. the spirits of the just made perfect.

Arg. 3. *Thirdly*, Again, Why should our salvation slumber, when the damnation of the wicked doth not slumber? God defers not their misery; and surely he will not defer our glory. If he be quick with his enemies, he will not be slow and dilatory with his friends. It cannot be imagined, but he is as much inclined to acts of favour to his children, as to acts of justice to his enemies; these are presently damned, Jude, ver. 7. Acts i. 25. 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20. And what reason why believers, yea, every believer, as well as this in the text, should not be, that very day in which they die, with Christ in glory?

Arg. 4. *Fourthly*, and *lastly*, How do such delays consist with Christ's ardent desires to have his people with him where he is, and with the vehement longings of their souls to be with Christ? You may see those reflected flames of love and desire of mutual enjoyment betwixt the bridegroom and his spouse in Rev. xxii. 17, 20. Delays make their hearts sick: the expectation and faith in which the saints die, is to be satisfied then; and surely God will not deceive them. I deny not but their glory will be more complete when the body, their absent friend, is re-united, and made to share with them in their happiness; yet that hinders not, but meanwhile the soul may enjoy its glory, whilst the body takes its rest, and sleeps in the dust.

Inference 1. Are believers immediately with God after their dissolution? *Then how surprizingly glorious will heaven be to believers!* Not that they are in it before they think of it, or are fitted for it; no, they have spent many thoughts upon it before, and been long preparing for it; but the *suddenness* and *greatness* of the change is amazing to our thoughts. For a soul to be now here in the body, conversing with men, living among sensible objects, and within a few moments to be with the Lord; this hour on earth, the next in the third heaven; now viewing this world, and anon standing among an innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect: O what a change is this! What! but wink, and see God! Commend thy soul to Christ, and be transferred in

the arms of angels into the invisible world, the world of spirits ! To live as angels of God ? To live without eating, drinking, sleeping ! To be lifted up from a bed of sickness to a throne of glory ! To leave a sinful, troublesome world, a sick and pained body, and be in a moment perfectly cured, and feel thyself perfectly well, and free from all troubles and distempers ! You cannot think what this will be ! Who can tell what sights, what apprehensions, what thoughts, what frames believing souls have, before the bodies they left are removed from the eyes of their dear surviving friends !

Inf. 2. Are believers immediately with God after their dissolution ? Where then shall the unbelievers be, and in what state will they find themselves immediately after death hath closed their eyes ? Ah ! what will the case of them be that go the other way ?

To be plucked out of house and body, from among friends and comforts, and thrust into endless miseries, into the dark vault of hell ; never to see the light of this world any more ; never to see a comfortable sight ; never to hear a joyful sound ; never to know the meaning of rest, peace, or delight any more. O what a change is here ! To exchange the smiles and honours of men, for the frowns and fury of God ; to be clothed with flames, and drink the pure unmixed wrath of God, who were but a few days since clothed in silks, and filled with the sweet of the creature ! How is the state of things altered with them ! It was the lamentable cry of poor Adrian, when he felt death approaching : “ O my poor wandering soul ! alas ! whither art thou going ! Where must thou lodge this night ! Thou shalt never jest more, never be merry more ! ”

Your term in your houses and bodies is out, and there is another habitation provided for you ; but it is a dismal one ! When a saint dies, heaven above is as it were moved to receive and entertain him ; at his coming, he is received into everlasting habitations, into the inheritance of the saints in light. When an unbeliever dies, we may say of him, alluding to Isa. xiv. 9. “ Hell from beneath is moved for him, to meet him at his coming ; it stirreth up the dead for him.” No more sports, nor plays, nor cups of wine, nor beds of pleasure : the more of these you enjoyed here, the more intolerable will this change be to you. If saints are immediately with God, others must be immediately with Satan.

Inf. 3. How little cause have they to fear death, who shall be with God so soon after their death ? Some there are that tremble at the thoughts of death ; that cannot endure to hear its name mentioned ; that would rather stoop to any misery here, yea, to any sin, than die, because they are afraid of the exchange. But you that

are interested in Christ, need not do so; you can lose nothing by the exchange: the words *Death*, *Grave*, and *Eternity*, should have another kind of sound in your ears, and make contrary impressions upon your hearts. If your earthly tabernacles cast you out, you shall not be found naked; you have “a building of God, an “house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;” and it is but a step out of this into that. O what fair, sweet, and lovely thoughts should you have of that great and last change! But what speak I of your fearlessness of death? Your duty lies much higher than that far.

Inf. 3. If believers are immediately with God, after their dissolution, then it is their duty to long for that dissolution, and cast many a longing look towards their graves. So did Paul, *I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ, which is far better.* The advantages of this exchange are unspeakable: You have gold for brass; wine for water; substance for shadow: solid glory for very vanity. Oh! if the dust of this earth were but once blown out of your eyes, that you might see the divine glory, how weary would you be to live? How willing to die; But then be sure your title be sound and good: leave not so great a concernment to the last; for, though it is confessed, God may do that in an hour, that never was done all your days, yet it is not common; which brings to our third and last observation.

Doct. 3. That God may, though he seldom doth, prepare men for glory immediately before their dissolution by death.

There is one *parable*, and no more, that speaks of some that were called at the last hour, Matt. xx. 9, 10. And there is this one instance in the text, and no more, that gives us an account of a person so called. We acknowledge God may do it, his grace is his own, he may dispense it how and where he pleaseth: we must always salve divine prerogative. Who shall fix bounds, or put limits to free grace, but God himself, whose it is? If he do not ordinarily shew such mercies to dying sinners (as indeed he doth not); yet it is not because he cannot, but because he will not; not because their hearts are so hardened by long custom in sin, that his grace cannot break them, but because he most justly withholds that grace from them. When blessed Mr. Bilney, the martyr, heard a minister preaching thus: O thou old sinner, thou hast lain these fifty years rotting in thy sin, dost thou think now to be saved? That the blood of Christ shall save thee? O, said Mr. Bilney, what preaching of Christ is this? If I had heard no other preaching than this, what had become of me? No, no, old sinners, or young sinners, great or small sinners, are not to be beaten

off from Christ, but encouraged to repentance and faith; for who knows but the bowels of mercy may yearn at last upon one that hath all along rejected it? This thief was as unlikely ever to receive mercy, but a few hours before he died, as any person in the world could be.

But surely this is no encouragement to neglect the present seasons of mercy, because God may shew mercy hereafter; or to neglect the ordinary, because God sometimes manifests his grace in ways extraordinary. Many, I know, have hardened themselves in ways of sin, by this example of mercy. But what God did at this time, for this man, cannot be expected to be done ordinarily for us; and the reasons thereof are:

Reason 1. *First*, Because God hath vouchsafed us the ordinary and standing means of grace, which this sinner had not; and therefore we cannot expect such extraordinary and unusual conversion as he had. This poor creature never heard in all likelihood, one sermon preached by Christ, or any of his apostles: He lived the life of a highwayman, and concerned not himself about religion. But we have Christ preached freely, and constantly in our assemblies: We have line upon line, precept upon precept: And when God affords the ordinary preaching of the gospel, he doth not use to work wonders. When Israel was in the wilderness, then God gave them bread from heaven, and clave the rocks to give them drink; but when they came to Canaan, where they had the ordinary means of subsistence, the manna ceased.

Reason 2. *Secondly*, Such a conversion as this, may not be ordinarily expected by any man, because such a time as that will never come again: it is possible, if Christ were to die again, and thou to be crucified with him, thou mightest receive thy conversion in such a miraculous and extraordinary way; but Christ dies no more; such a day as that will never come again.

Mr. Fenner, in his excellent discourse upon this point, tells us, That as this was an extraordinary time, Christ being now to be installed in his kingdom, and crowned with glory and honour; so extraordinary things were now done; as when kings are crowned, the streets are richly hanged, the conduits run with wine, great malefactors are then pardoned, for then they shew their munificence and bounty; it is the day of the gladness of their hearts. But let a man come at another time to the conduits, he shall find no wine, but ordinary water there. Let a man be in the jail at another time, and he may be hanged; yea, and have no reason but to expect and prepare for it. What Christ did now for this man, was at an extraordinary time.

Reason 3. *Thirdly*, Such a conversion as this may not ordinarily be expected; for as such a time will never come again, so there

will never be the like reason for such a conversion any more: Christ converted him upon the cross, to give an instance of his divine power at that time, when it was almost wholly clouded: Look, as in that day the divinity of Christ brake forth in several miracles, as the preternatural eclipse of the sun, the great earthquake, the rending of the rocks and vail of the temple; so in the conversion of this man in such an extraordinary way, and all, to give evidence of the divinity of Christ, and prove him to be the Son of God whom they crucified; but that is now sufficiently confirmed, and there will be no more occasion for miracles to evidence it.

Reason 4. Fourthly, None hath reason to expect the like conversion, that enjoys the ordinary means; because, though in this convert we have a pattern of what free grace can do, yet, as divines pertinently observe, it is a pattern without a promise; God hath not added any promise to it, that ever he will do it for any other; and where we have not a promise to encourage our hope, our hope can signify but little to us.

Inference 1. Let those that have found mercy in the evening of their life, admire the extraordinary grace that therein hath appeared to them. O that ever God should accept the bran, when Satan hath had the flour of thy days! The fore-mentioned reverend author tells us of one Marcus Caius Victorius, a very aged man in the primitive times, who was converted from Heathenism to Christianity in his old age. This man came to Simplicianus, a minister, and told him, he heartily owned and embraced the Christian faith. But neither he nor the church would trust him for a long time; and the reason was, the unusualness of a conversion at such an age. But after he had given them good evidence of the reality thereof, there were acclamations and singing of Psalms, the people every where crying, Marcus Caius Victorius is become a Christian. This was written for a wonder! Oh! if God have wrought such wondrous salvation for any of you, what cause have you to do more for him than others! What! to pluck you out of hell when one foot was in! To appear to you at last, when so hardened by long custom in sin, that one might say, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" Oh! what riches of mercy have appeared to you!

Inf. 2. Let this convince and startle such, as even to their gray hairs, remain in an unconverted state, who are where they were when they first came into the world, yea, rather further off by much.

Bethink yourselves, ye that are full of days, and full of sin, whose time is almost done, and your great work not begun: who have but a few sands more in the upper part of the glass to run down, and then your conversion will be impossible; your sun is

setting; your night is coming; the shadows of the evening are stretched out upon you; you have one foot in the grave, and the other in hell. O think, if all sense and tenderness be not withered up as well as natural verdure; think with yourselves how sad a case you are in: God may do wonders, but they are not seen every day, then they would cease to be wondered at. O strive, strive, while you have a little time, and a few helps and means more; strive to get that work accomplished now that was never done yet; defer it no longer, you have done so too much already.

It may be (to use * Seneca's expression) you have been these sixty, seventy, or eighty years, beginning to live, about to change your practice; but hitherto you still continue the same. Do not you see how Satan hath gulled, and cheated you with vain purposes, till he hath brought you to the very brink of the grave and hell? O it is time now to make a stand, and pause a little where you are, and to what he hath brought you. The Lord at last give you an eye to see, and an heart to consider.

Inf. 3. Lastly, Let this be a call and caution to all young ones to begin with God betime, and take heed of delays till the last, so as many thousands have done before them to their eternal ruin. Now is your time, if you desire to be in Christ; if you have any sense of the weight and worth of eternal things upon your hearts: I know your age is voluptuous, and delights not in the serious thoughts of death and eternity: you are more inclined to mind your pleasures, and leave these grave and serious matters to old age: but let me persuade you against that, by these considerations.

First, O set to the business of religion now, because this is the moulding age. Now your hearts are tender, and your affections flowing: now is the time when you are most likely to be wrought upon.

Secondly, Now, because this is the freest part of your time. It is in the morning of your life, as in the morning of the day: if a man have any business to be done, let him take the morning for it; for in the after-part of the day a hurry of business comes on, so that you either forget it, or want opportunity for it.

Thirdly, Now, because your life is immediately uncertain; you are not certain that ever you shall attain the years of your fathers: there are graves in the church-yard just of your length; and skulls of all sorts and sizes in Golgotha, as the Jews proverb is.

Fourthly, Now, because God will not spare you because you are but young sinners, little sinners, if you die Christless. If you are not, as you think, old enough to mind Christ, surely, if you die

* *Semper victuri.* Always about to live.

Christless, you are old enough to be damned: there is the small spray, as well as great logs in the fire of hell.

Fifthly, Now, because *your life will be the more eminently useful, and serviceable to God, when you know him betimes, and begin with him early.* Austin repented, and so have many thousands since, that he began so late, and knew God no sooner.

Sixthly, Now, because *your life will be the sweeter to you, when the morning of it is dedicated to the Lord.* The first fruits sanctify the whole harvest: this will have a sweet influence into all your days, whatever changes, straits, or troubles you may afterwards meet with.

SERMON XXXIII.

The fourth excellent Saying of CHRIST upon the Cross,
illustrated.

MATTH. XXVII. 46.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani; that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

THIS verse contains the fourth memorable saying of Christ upon the cross; words able to rend the hardest heart in the world: it is the voice of the Son of God in an agony*: his sufferings were great, very great before, but never in that extremity as now; when this heaven-rending and heart-melting out-cry brake from him upon the cross, *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* In which are considerable, the time, matter, and manner of this his sad complaint.

First, The time when it was uttered, “about the ninth hour,” i. e. about three of the clock afternoon. For as the Jews divided the night into four quarters, or watches; so they divided the day, in like manner, into four quarters, or greater hours; which had their names from that hour of the day that closed the quarter. So that beginning their account of their lesser hours from six in the morning, which with them was the first, their ninth hour answered to our third afternoon. And this is heedfully marked by the evangelists, on purpose to shew us how long Christ hanged in distress upon the cross, both in soul and body, which at least was full

* I know these are the words of one in agony, and in the utmost anguish of soul. *Heinsius on this place.*