

SERMON XVII.

“I wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him. Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of Hosts, which dwelleth in Mount Zion.”

Isaiah 8.17-18

THE prophet, in the former part of this chapter, has been threatening the adversaries of Zion with an overthrow; then he comes to threaten sad judgments on the married bands, which they should not be able to resist or escape; and withal he inhibits the Lord's people from joining with those who decline in an evil time. In order to prevent their destruction, he exhorts them to “sanctify the Lord of hosts, and to make Him only their fear,” and to cleave close unto Him, who promises to be a sanctuary unto them; but all that join with decliners in an evil time he threatens with utter destruction. Yet the prophet, thinking these words would not have weight enough, except with a very few, further says, “Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.” Here he hints at the duty of the godly in an evil time, which is to wait on the Lord. While he speaks for himself, he likewise speaks in the name of all the godly. Truly he speaks what will be the case and condition of those who resolve to be waiting, namely, that they shall be for signs and wonders in Israel.

Here he hints not only at the lot of the children of God, begotten by his ministry, who should be made signs and wonders amongst the profane and ungodly, but also those children who, by their abiding faithful, though reduced, should signify good to the Church. Then he warns them against charmers — not to make application to these dead dogs, in seeking the living amongst the dead, but to cleave to the true God, to the law and to the testimony. To encourage them to go to God, and keep them from going to these charmers, he denounces dreadful judgments upon those who make application to them; such as, that they “shall curse their King, and their God, and look

upward.” They shall receive comfort from none of these whom they have followed. Now in the text there is,

1st, The sad lot of the Church of God held out in these words: “That hideth His face from the house of Israel.”

2ndly, Ye have the ordinary lot of the Church of God in that case, that they are made signs and wonders in Israel, to be mocked and gazed at; but there is a mystery in it, in regard that it is from the Lord of Hosts. As if he would say, “Seeing it is from the Lord, we ought to bear it better.”

3rdly, Ye have in the words the duty of the people of God; and that is to wait on the Lord until their sentence come forth from before Him; until He plead their cause, and execute judgment for them. Many a time it falls out to be the lot of the children of God, that He hides His face from them. “Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel the Saviour.” And this is often the complaint of God’s people in Scripture.

Now for clearing of these, I shall speak a little unto these things.

1. What is signified by the Lord’s hiding of His face.
2. What are the causes why the Lord does so.
3. I shall speak of the duty of the Lord’s people when He thus hides His face from them.

I. Then what is signified by the Lord’s hiding of His face? and for answer to this:

1. By the hiding of His face is meant: The Lord’s seeming to stand aloof from noticing the cause of His people. Hence the Psalmist complains, “Why standest thou afar off, O Lord, why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?”

2. By the Lord’s hiding of His face is meant, or understood: The refraining of His Spirit on the ordinances, or withholding His influences therefrom, so that the Word of the Lord has not that kindly effect, and operative power upon the heart as it

has had formerly. But your hearts are hardened from His fear. Hence the prophet complains, “Why hast thou hardened our hearts from thy fear?” A complaint put in beside these words, and where is the sounding of thy bowels.¹

3. By the Lord’s hiding of His face must be understood: The Lord’s refraining of the Spirit of prayer. “We all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities like the wind have carried us away.” “There is none that calleth upon thy name; that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee.” We have not an heart to pray and he gives the reason for it, “Thou hidest thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.”

4. By the Lord’s hiding of His face is meant: The Lord’s keeping of His mind from His people. The Lord is doing strange things; but His people have no open vision. Hence they complain, “We see not our signs; there are no more prophets; neither is there any amongst us that knoweth how long!” Job likewise complains that the Lord passed by on his right and left hand, but he could not perceive Him, or what He was doing. I confess when the Lord wraps up His mind in the public ordinances, it is the saddest of all these ways mentioned of the Lord’s hiding of His face from His people.

II. A second thing from this doctrine is: Why it is that the Lord hides His face from His people.

I confess it is hard to speak of all the reasons the Lord may have for this. It is very hard so see or conceive this. Say ye, “The Lord hides His face from a whole land for trial;” but the Lord may hide His face from particular persons for the trial of their faith; but He will not readily do it from a whole land, but for the punishment of their sins; and that, because there is no land so clean and upright, but that He may have many things to charge against it. But the reasons I shall specify why it is that the Lord hides His face from His people, are:

1st, Sin. Sin separates many a time betwixt God and us. Many

gross and grievous transgressions have filled this land, and defiled it so that the Lord has no more honour or credit by His people therein.

2ndly, The Lord hides His face in the public ordinances for the deceit of the people in their approaches unto God. There is hypocrisy and deceit in our frequenting of ordinances. Few come with a design or resolution to improve what they hear. "Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?" Do not my words do good to those that walk uprightly? That is, if ye deal not deceitfully with God; and thence I give this reason as particularly relating to the former cause of the hidings of God's face from His people. But,

III. What is the duty of the Lord's people in that case when He hides His face from them? And,

1. His people should search and try their ways, and turn unto the Lord. This is thought a common truth, yet it is a good old truth. Many look for vain things to be done as their duty; but I will assure you, till the land, especially the godly in it, search and try what is the evil of their own ways and doings, and turn from them, ye need never expect peace from God or that He will be at peace with you again. For this was the way His people took of old, "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again unto the Lord." Therefore acknowledge your sins, and the evil of your own ways, or you shall not soon have a comfortable visit of God again. Yea, and more, if ye do not search and try your ways His vengeance shall be upon these lands.

2. When God hides His face, it is the duty of His people to justify Him in all that He does, and to judge themselves to be guilty. Lay aside then your ornaments, and lie in the dust. It is not a time now to dress up yourselves in a gaudy manner. No, ye should sit in sackcloth if ye would expect manifestations of favour from God. Be humble before Him. Many of you are ready to say, "The king, the nobles, and ministers have all the blame of what is now upon the land." But no man says, What have I done? But till everyone look what himself hath done, I

justify the Lord, and say He hath done nothing contrary to the covenant, which is, “If ye forsake Him, and break His laws, He will chastise you with rods, yea, with the rods of men.” I say, until ye do so, ye need never expect your troubles will cease. Remember that this is told you in the name of the Lord. You are ready now to make light of this word. But it shall find you out and witness against you one day or other yet.

3. When the Lord hides His face, it is the duty of His people to strengthen what remains. Is there anything left! Go, I pray you, and strengthen that, “and take unto you words, and return unto the Lord.” Is there no more left but words, make use of these; and speak the oftener to one another.² Is prayer left? I pray you, ply it well. Can ye pray better with others than by yourself alone? then improve social prayer well. Whatever duty ye come best speed in, ye should make it your care to go about that duty. Whatever remains, ye should strengthen that. It is the will of God you should do so. If ye do not, ye know what is threatened. “Be watchful, strengthen that which remains, which is ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God.” And then He threatens to come upon them as a thief unexpectedly and suddenly.

4. When the Lord hides His face, it is the duty of all His people, who are doing these three things mentioned, to wait on the Lord and expect good from Him, both unto themselves and to the Church. “Let Israel wait upon the Lord, from this time forth, and for ever. Wait upon the Lord, and be of good courage; and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, upon the Lord.” Reflect again upon the ground of hope ye had long since, and see what more grounds ye had then than ye have now. Had ye the hope of the Lord’s work thriving then when it was very low before? Then what ground of hope want ye now that ye had then? Are armies gone? the spirit of prayer gone? Shall the hope of Israel depend on these things—on a few men in arms, and on the blowing of the spirit? Is this all our hope, that we have armies in the field whose rottenness is too visible this day; or shall the ground of your hope and expectation be founded upon the breathings of the spirit of

prayer, which proceed more from the prosperity and success of arms than from any other thing? Or did not many of you say, betwixt God and you, after Mr. Macdonald's³ days, that ye would no more be ashamed of your hope? Did you not say so, in the Duke's days,⁴ and likewise when the English invaded the land;⁵ and why should ye be ashamed to hope and trust in the Lord now, as well as ever ye did?

For USE, I wish ye were all convinced that God is hiding His face from His people at this time. There are, no doubt, some who think these are the best days ever they saw. But dreadful is the case of such. "Let not my soul enter into their secret." There are some that say the ark is returned out of the land of the Philistines. I shall say no more for confuting the opinion of such but this: I fear ye shall, ere all be done, miss in that ark these two principal things:

1. The two tables of the law written by the finger of God Himself. And

2. Aaron's rod blossoming. But when our covenanted God hides His face, then turn unto Him and take with the evil of your ways. Be serious in all the parts of God's worship, and diligent in them all. Wait upon Him and expect good from Him in the use of all these means.

DOCT. I. When God hides His face, then faithful ministers and their converts are for signs and wonders in Israel.

So much says the text, "Behold I and the children which thou hast given me are for signs and wonders." David says, "I am a wonder to many."

Now, in speaking to this doctrine, I shall notice these things:

1. It supposeth that faithful and honest ministers have some children begotten by them in the work of the Gospel.
2. Those children are the gift of God.

3. There is a mutual interest between these two, viz., the minister as the parent, and the converts as the children being converted by his ministry. And,
4. It is ordinary for faithful men or ministers to be put first upon the brunt of the trial. And,
5. Let the minister and his converts suffer what they will, it is ordinary that they are both one, especially in being made signs and wonders in Israel in an evil time.

1st, For the first of these, it supposeth that faithful ministers have converts; and,

1. For ordinary, when the Lord lights a candle there is a great light; so when the Lord plants an honest and faithful ministry, there is some work there, though they are often but few in number.
2. These converts for ordinary are hid from the minister himself.
3. And yet in the hour of trial they appear who are His children; for, if they appear not in the time of trial, I have little skill or hope of them.

2ndly, These converts are the gift of God; and I would have you remember that the minister cannot convert any of himself; and therefore hath little to glory in or boast of, so that people have no ministers to thank for their conversion. And yet it is their duty who are ministers to labour as it were in birth, to see if they can be instrumental in forming Christ in any of these over whom they have the charge and oversight in the ministry.

3rdly, There is a mutual interest between the minister and his converts. And that is,

1. In regard of spiritual things, “They have one Lord, one faith, and one baptism;” and that which edifies the people may be edifying to the minister himself.
2. In regard of sympathy, what troubles the one affects

the other also; what makes the one sad makes the other sad also, and when the one rejoices, the other is glad and rejoices also.

3. As to giving and receiving, there is a mutual communication even of things temporal. All things are, as it were, common—if the one have, the other will not be in want.

4thly, It is most ordinary for ministers that are most faithful to be first put upon suffering in an evil time, and the reasons are:

1. Because they are for ordinary most free in the discharge of their duty in an evil time, a circumstance which lays them open to the malice of the adversary.
2. It then comes to pass that those children begotten by their ministry are discovered, and made appear, who were in some measure latent and obscure before.
3. It is because those that are good have in providence a thorn in the flesh given them, that they should not be exalted above measure. This serves to keep them humble for all that the Lord hath made them forthcoming for to Him. He exposes them to straits and difficulties; and then it were good for all to judge of them as the Lord doth. There is a time when the Lord appears in the Church openly, and shines upon them, and then they are honourable. Again, there is a time when He hides His face from them, and they are troubled and despicable. They are then for signs and for wonders in Israel.

5thly, The last thing in this doctrine is, that oftentimes ministers and their converts share in one and the same lot, especially in being for signs and wonders in Israel. And,

1. They are noticed and taken for strangers and singular persons who are the troublers of Israel.
2. They are signs and wonders in Israel, as they become and are made the common talk or discourse of the

- country side and the times they live in. And,
3. They are said to be for signs and wonders as to their usage and entertainment. The treatment they meet with gives a proof of their temper and disposition. According as they are dealt with, men may judge of the goodness or badness of the times wherein they live in the world.
 4. Again, they are for signs and wonders as to their carriage or deportment. This is a clear proof that may be expected or looked for of the choice that His people make of God for their party in an evil time. Ye should consider:
 - (a) That nothing falls out to the people of God but what is according to His determinate purpose. There cannot an hair of their head fall to the ground without His providential hand or disposal, hence it is said of Christ, "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." No more than this they could do.
 - (b) Again, He hath thoughts of peace towards His people, come what will. "I know the thought that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." And seeing that the Lord hath thoughts of peace towards His people, it says that He doth not arrays afflict them, and therefore they are to search out the causes of their affliction. And,
 - (c) Although the thing falls out according to the purpose of God, yet instruments are not the less culpable or guilty, nor shall they escape His judgments for their wickedness in due time. It, however, concerns all the people of God to take Him for their party, and to study to have Him upon their side as their second; for this is the great work the people of God have to do upon such an occasion.

USE 1. This should quell and compose the hearts of God's people very much, that nothing more nor less can be done or fall out towards them but by His determinate counsel.

USE 2. Let the faith of this be fixed in your hearts that He hath still thoughts of peace toward you. Let me see the man or woman that hath chosen Him as their God and treasure, even that treasure hid in the field, and hath accounted Him the pearl of great price, valued at the highest rate. Such may wait for peace, according to His word, "He shall sit and rule upon his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both." What two? The offices of Christ as king and priest, that are so fixed, and the peace of His people as settled between them; so that as He can no more remove these two offices of Christ, so neither can the peace or safety of His people be removed, for they are equally fixed and made sure.

USE 3. Lay aside all passion and rancour, then, at men; go and secure your interest with God in Christ. Get Him on your side, otherwise all is in vain. Man is not your party or second in this, but the Lord God Almighty and His strength.

DOCT. II. *Let God hide Himself as it pleaseth Him, yet He is still within doors, so to speak.*

For here it is said that the stroke is from the Lord, that dwelleth in Mount Zion. He hath His abode there. Wherefore ye should remember:

1. That the Lord dwells not in His Church as One who is not affected with her case and condition. No; He is mindful of her concerns, and those who touch His people touch as it were "the apple of his eye," thus He is concerned in whatever, either good or evil, befalls His children and people.

2. As long as God dwells amongst His people, He hath always some work to work amongst them. He is not there without a cause as an indifferent spectator.

3. Although it be true that He is in the Church, yet He is not

confined unto any particular Church in the world since the days of Israel. He engaged Himself unto His people of Israel until the Messiah came; and He hath engaged Himself to return again unto them when the fullness of the Gentiles is brought in.

4. Although it be so, that He is not engaged unto any particular Church, yet there are some Churches have more ground to expect His abode with them than what other Churches have. And I take Britain and Ireland to be of that number, for the following reasons:

(1.) I take Great Britain and Ireland to be a part of the ends of the earth that are given to Christ. "Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession." Besides it is the very parcel or plot of ground that He intended for that end or use; for the Lord did take possession of these lands beyond any other land since the apostolic age.

(2.) These lands have sworn away themselves unto the Lord most solemnly, singularly, and frequently. Seven times hath Scotland been sworn away unto the Lord, in little more than the space of an hundred years.⁶ I grant indeed, that these covenants have been broken, for which breach the Lord hath been plaguing these lands; and as there hath been no breach of covenant formerly like unto this, so I think there hath no plague come like that which we may now expect. And yet seeing there is still a party in the land who adhere to these covenants, and have given a testimony for them, and that party is and will be accounted to the Lord for a generation, or the holy seed and substance of the land; since this is the case, God and these witnesses will not part yet if they shall abide by and adhere to these covenants.

3. A ground of hope that God will not quit His interest in Scotland, England, and Ireland is, that there was no land or nation wherein the Lord's work was carried to such a pitch, such a high pitch, as it hath been in them, since the days of the

apostles. And do ye think that the Lord will eradicate and utterly overthrow that work? I think He will not.

The last ground I observe is this, that according to the text the Lord is in His Church in Britain and Ireland. And it is good token that He is yet amongst us and that “God will help her, and that right early.”

USE 1. We are then a people and a part of the Church of God, seeing there is so much of the true ordinance of God to be yet found amongst us.

USE 2. Seeing God is in the Church, He is not far off if ye will seek Him. Seek Him therefore seriously; for He is most willing to be found of you.

USE 3. Although God be not absolutely bound or engaged to any one particular Church, since the days of Israel of old, yet from the foresaid grounds we are not left without hope that the Lord will yet dwell amongst us, “and the God of Jacob will be our refuge, Selah.”

DOCT. IV. *That when a people are shaken out of all self-confidence it is their duty then to wait upon God.*

We are to do so

1. Because we are commanded. “Wait on the Lord” is often commanded in Scripture.

2. We should wait on the Lord because of the promise that is annexed unto this exercise. “Those that wait upon the Lord shall never be ashamed.”

3. To wait upon the Lord is the most quiescent and composed posture one can possibly be in. In an evil time “it is good to hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.”

4. Wait upon the Lord, for it hath been the work and practice of the people of God, even in the days of old. Says the Psalmist,

“My soul waits for the Lord, more than they that do watch for the morning.”

5. To wait upon God has always a joyful issue. “Lo! this is our God, we have waited for him, we will rejoice in him.”

But that you may the better know, when it is your duty to wait upon the Lord, I shall in the next place, show you, (1.) What proceeds, or goes before waiting upon the Lord. (2.) What it is to wait, or what this waiting doth import. And (3.) What follows upon a right waiting upon the Lord. And,

1. The thing that goes before waiting upon the Lord, is,

(1.) The duty itself is fully holden forth in this chapter. “Say not a confederacy with them to whom this people shall say a confederacy;” that is, Let not their words make you afraid. “But only sanctify the Lord in your hearts;” that is, be only afraid of offending Him.

(2.) Consider that there is a promise held out to those who make Him their fear, “He shall be for a sanctuary unto them.”

(3.) There is a threatening pronounced against the common multitude who decline and join with the times. “He will be for a stone of stumbling unto them.” It is but a promise held out to those who walk aright; while it is a threatening against those who go wrong and comply in an evil time. And then there follows a wrapping up of the law and ordinances amongst the disciples or people of God, for a time.

2. There is the duty of waiting, which imports,

(1.) The termination of the heart, with an expectation fixed only upon God for help, and upon none else. “My soul, wait thou only upon God: for my expectation is from him.” That is, Wait upon God, and upon no other. Similar is that word, “Help us, Lord, for vain is the help of man.”

(2.) To wait upon God imports this also, that their expectation

is more on God Himself than on any created means. God can give you means; but if you get not Himself no matter what ye get. He may send back your means for a plague unto you and not for your good; therefore plead with Him, and be positive with Him, and say, "Go with us, Lord, or else carry us not up hence." So I say, ye should plead more for God's presence than any other means under heaven.

(3.) To wait on God imports a submitting to the seasons of the outgate from your present condition, and the ordering of it and all that concerns you, while under the trial.

(4.) To wait upon God imports a resolution to abide at the duty of waiting, until He show you what else ye should do. For waiting on God is still your duty while ye are in the dark, and can use no other means for your relief.

3. These things follow after waiting, and are clear from the text.

(1.) You must resolve to be for signs and wonders in Israel; if once ye resolve to be a waiter on God ye must resolve to be mocked, reproached, banished, imprisoned, and every other way persecuted for Christ.

(2.) A great many temptations follow a waiting upon God.

(3.) There will be few left to preach the gospel or to consult with in that dark time. He says, "Go to the law, and to the testimony." Ye must then make use of your Bibles instead of your ministers. But,

(4.) The manifest vengeance of God shall be upon those who turn aside. That shall be their lot who oppose the work and people of God.

USE 1. Have ye your work and duty in a dark time? Then go to God and do not pretend ignorance, and say, "What shall we do?" I say, "Wait upon the Lord," and judge yourselves happy, that the thing which is your duty men cannot take from

you though they may take your life from you.

USE 2. Lay your account with temptation, under that lot to cause you to turn aside. Therefore study to be clear in your judgments, as to the honesty and justness of the cause, and for that end be well acquainted with the Scripture, and there see what is your duty.

And to conclude, believe this, that God's wrath abides on those that turn aside from Him; and all which they before took pleasure in shall forsake them, or shall be embittered to them in that day, when the waiters shall enjoy what they waited for.

Footnotes:

1. See Sermon V. upon this text.
2. I suppose he here means society or fellowship meetings, a duty instituted in Scripture, and however much neglected and flouted at, yet was much practised in our land when religion flourished.
3. This Macdonald rose with Montrose, and fought with the Covenanters, and killed 30,000 of them.
4. Duke Hamilton went to England with an army to assist Charles I., A.D. 1648.
5. By the English I suppose he means the invasion under Oliver Cromwell.
6. According to Knox, Spotswood, Calderwood, Petrie, Defoe, Stevenson, Crookshanks, and others, what they called the first Covenant was entered into at Edinburgh in December, 1557; the second at Perth, in May, 1559; the third at Edinburgh, 1560. What is called the National Covenant was entered into in 1581 and again subscribed in 1590; again renewed by the

Assembly in 1596; and afterwards sworn with great solemnity by all ranks through the laud in 1638. The Solemn League and Covenant was sworn in October, 1641. These Covenants were again taken by the king and others in 1650, and were renewed by the handful of witnesses at Lanark, November 20, 1666. What a sad reproach it is to the present generation that they seek to cast off the obligations that our forefathers came under to the Lord! There are many in our day who not only slight and neglect the duty of covenanting, but deny the warrantableness of it, though we have manifold Scripture examples of covenanting (Josh. 24.25, Nehem. 9.38, 2 Cor. 8.5). We have prophecies of it, as what would take place in New Testament days (Isa. 19.18,20). We have precious promises of it (Isa. 44.5). We have precepts for it (Psa. 76.11, Mat. 5.33).