

# A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE

## FUNERAL OF MR. SAMUEL LAWRENCE,

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT NANTWICH IN CHESHIRE.

WITH A CONCISE ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 27.

*Lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.*

O THAT the occasion of our meeting here to-day had been such, that this whole verse had been applicable to it! If when our dear brother (whose remains we have just now laid in the silent grave) was sick, nigh unto death, God had heard our prayers, had seen our tears, had ordered the sun of life to go back, or rather the shadow of it, (for it is but a shadow,) and had added to his days, as to Hezekiah's, and we had been met here to return thanks for his recovery, with what pleasure should I have applied this whole verse to such a joyful occasion; *For indeed he was sick, nigh unto death, but God had mercy on him, and spared him, and not on him only, but on me also, and on you likewise, and on many others, lest we should have sorrow upon sorrow.*

But alas, this is not our case; it is not a song of praise that is this day put into our mouths, but a song of lamentation; nor is the case any longer within the reach of prayer. While our friend was yet alive, we wept and made supplication, for we said, *Who can tell but God will yet be gracious to us, and he shall live.* We pleaded, *Shall Jonathan die,* (1 Sam. xiv. 45.) who has been instrumental of so much good to the souls of many, who is such a blessing to Israel, and likely to be more so, likely in a course of nature to be long so? But now he is dead, though we desire patiently to submit to the holy will of God, and to reconcile ourselves to this dark dispensation, acknowledging that God is just in this which he has brought upon us, yet we think we may have liberty to bemoan ourselves under so sore a breach made upon our comforts; nay, we think it is our duty, when we sow such precious

seed, sow it in corruption and dishonour, though we believe it shall be raised again in glory and incorruption, yet to bear it forth weeping, and to sow it in tears. If Jonathan be fallen we cannot but say, *We are distressed for him, for very pleasant has he been unto us,* and therefore very painful must it needs be to have him thus suddenly rent from us, in the midst of his great usefulness.

We have occasion then, at present, to make use only of the last words of the verse, *Sorrow upon sorrow.* That which Paul dreaded, but it was by the mercy of God prevented, in the case of Epaphroditus, we feel we have, I am sure I feel I have, *sorrow upon sorrow*, a complication, an addition, of sorrows, which ought to be no surprise to us in this vale of tears, this lower region, where the clouds return after the rain, in a world where we are bid to expect tribulation, and to count upon it.

Our observation from the text, with application to the present sad occasion, though it be only implied, yet rises easily and naturally. If Epaphroditus had died, Paul, who was now already in great distress, by reason of his removal and distance from his friends at Philippi, would have had sorrow upon sorrow; the sorrow of burying one friend, upon the sorrow of being separated from many more: and therefore when such a one as Epaphroditus was, is removed from us by death, we have sorrow upon sorrow; that is, we have *great sorrow*, many sorrows included in this one. And sometimes Providence so orders the circumstances of this affliction, that it is, to those who are nearly interested in the case, (as Paul was in that of Epaphroditus,) one sorrow added to another, like Job's messengers; as the waves of the sea, *deep calling unto deep.* Broken with breach upon breach.

To accommodate this to our present purpose, we

must consider who this Epaphroditus was, whose death would have been so great a grief to St. Paul. He was an evangelist; not only in the larger signification of the word, a *preacher of the gospel*, a *bringer of good tidings*, but in its more peculiar sense, he was an assistant to the apostles in founding and planting churches. Such was Timothy, Titus, Silas, and others, who were sometimes the apostles' companions and associates in their itinerant work, sometimes their substitutes and agents; whom they sent where they could not come, or left where they could not stay, to set in order the things that were wanting; to settle the churches which the apostles had planted under the conduct of their ordinary pastors and teachers, and then to leave them. This Epaphroditus is the same with that Epaphras, Col. i. 7. who first preached the gospel at Colosse, and planted a church there; afterwards was for some time at Philippi, and watered the church there; and was now at Rome, sent thither by the Philippians on an errand to St. Paul, and sent back by St. Paul to them with this epistle.

Now we may look upon this good man,

1. As a dear friend of Paul's, and one whom he had a great love and value for. He calls him here, (v. 25.) his brother and companion in labour, and his fellow-soldier; and, (Col. i. 7.) his dear fellow-servant. St. Paul was the chief of the apostles, excelled them all in gifts, and graces, and usefulness, was a prime minister of state in Christ's kingdom, yet see his humility; he accepts the help of Epaphroditus, who was every way his inferior, makes use of it, rejoices in it, and is afraid of being deprived of it. Much more reason have we to acknowledge the need we have of our brethren's help, and to be thankful for it, to see the advantage we have by it for the strengthening of our hands, and the carrying on of our work, and to see what losers we are by their removal; nay, we are ignorant of ourselves, if we esteem not others better than ourselves, and reckon not that we could be better spared.

Paul calls Epaphroditus his brother, for all we are brethren; all true Christians, all faithful ministers, are so, for they have all one and the same Father, and all belong to one and the same family. He calls him his *companion in labour*, for he was engaged in the same work; and his *fellow-soldier*, for he was engaged in the same warfare; and the share he had with him in services and sufferings increased Paul's affection to him. If he be his fellow-servant, and be such a one as he should be, he is a *dear fellow-servant*, Paul's heart is upon him, and he loves him as his own soul. It becomes the servants of Jesus Christ, not only to love their Master, but to love their fellow-servants, to call them their *dear fellow-servants*, not jealous of their rivalry, or envious at

their success, but taking pleasure in them and their prosperity. Fellow-soldiers who have ventured their lives together, should thereby have their hearts knit together. Epaphroditus was upon this account dear to Paul, who, therefore, could scarce bear the thoughts of parting with him.

2. As a faithful servant to the churches, whose care was not confined to one church, but was extended to many. He laid out himself to promote every thing that was good among Christians; he is your messenger, one that you have employed, and put a confidence in, one that you have made your representative, that manages the affairs of your church so wisely, so well. Epaphroditus, as it should seem, was now sent by the Philippians to Rome to attend Paul, to see what he wanted, and to bring him some supplies which they had collected for him.

This was he who was *sick, nigh unto death*, and if he had died it would have been an occasion of great sorrow to Paul, for though Paul was a man who had the command of his passions, yet he was not a stock or a stone, or a stoic, void of passion; our Lord Jesus himself was not; because he loved Lazarus, he wept over his grave, John xi. 35, 36. and has warranted us to do so; and here we have occasion for it. Though we pretend not to compare our friends and fellow-servants *with*, yet we hope we may compare them *to*, St. Paul's friends and fellow-servants; they walk (though not *passibus æquis—* *with equal steps*) in the same spirit, and in the same steps, and therefore we ought to be in like manner affected with their removal.

DOCT. The death of faithful ministers is just cause for sorrow, and sometimes, especially, it is so circumstanced that it becomes sorrow upon sorrow.

I. The death of faithful ministers is just cause for sorrow; parting with them is a very mournful thing. yea, though they have continued long in their usefulness, and some may think it is time they should go off to make room for others, yet in that case their death is to be lamented, as Elisha's was by the king of Israel, 2 Kings xiii. 14. though he was then very old, and we had heard nothing of him a great while; and we must thus show that we have esteemed them highly in love for their work's sake. Yea, though they should die martyrs, and should themselves rejoice to be offered up, yet in that case, as in Stephen's, *devout men will make great lamentation for them*; much more is it to be lamented when there is not that gain to the church by their deaths, and might long have been in all probability great gain to the church by their lives. It is justly reckoned an argument of great stupidity, if, when such men are taken away, we do not consider it, and lay it to heart. Observe,

1. Ministers, faithful ministers, are subject to the

stroke of death as well as others. They know themselves, and we know, that they must certainly and shortly put off this their tabernacle; *Our fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?* We see they do not.

They are not exempted from death, for the treasure is put into earthen vessels; they also are formed out of the clay, though they are to us in God's stead, and they must return to their dust. They are indeed called the angels of the churches, such is the dignity of their office, but alas we find them mortal dying men; and when they are subject to like passions as others, it is not strange they are subject to like strokes as others. The law made men priests, and the gospel makes men ministers, who had infirmity, and therefore could not continue, could not continue long, by reason of death, which must be and will be where sin is.

Nay, they are exposed more than others; death is working in them, when life in you; their work wastes them, their sorrows wear them, and they gladly spend, and cannot but be spent, for you. A wicked world is ready to say, Away with them, they are not worthy to live;<sup>b</sup> a gracious God says, Away with them, the ungrateful world is not worthy of them;<sup>c</sup> so that the point seems to be agreed, that good men must not live long in this world.

2. Death is the occasion of grief; ordinarily it is so; when man goes to his long home the mourners go about the streets. The house where death is, is called the house of mourning; it is so unless either those who are removed were, or those who are left behind are, void of natural affection. There was a great cry throughout Egypt, when there was not a house in which there was not one dead.<sup>d</sup> It is death reigning in this world as it does, that makes it a vale of tears; in heaven, and there only, where there is no more death, all tears are wiped away from men's eyes.

3. The death of good ministers ought to be in a special manner mourned for; this is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation, as much as any death. Moses, and Aaron, and Samuel, were men that all Israel went into real mourning for. The death of ministers makes God's house a house of mourning, and sensibly affects those who are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, to whom the reproach of it is a burthen. Then the ways of Zion mourn, when the guides and overseers in those ways are removed; then her elders put on sackcloth, when those who were the ornaments of the elders' seat are removed.

(1.) It is matter of sorrow to the people. They were the messengers of the churches, God's messengers to them by the word; messengers of good tidings, whose feet upon that account were beautiful; they

were their messengers to God by prayer, who many a time went to the throne of grace on their errands, spread their case before the Lord, and made intercession for them, and were helpers of their joy; they were interpreters. Now the removal of such ought to be sadly lamented, because it breaks in upon the intercourse we have with heaven, the keeping up of which is so much our business and so much our bliss in our present state.

When these messengers are called away by death, you ought to be afflicted, and mourn, and weep.

[1.] Because of the love which we hope you bare to them, that you may testify and express it. They loved you, and *travailed in birth again for you*, till they saw some good evidence of Christ's being formed in you. You know how they exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his children; how near their hearts your spiritual welfare lay, what a grief it was to them when any of you walked disorderly, and how much your well-doing was their joy. You have perceived what a tender concern they have had for you, *Who is weak, and I am not weak?* what a fear they have been in concerning you, lest you should come short, lest you should seem to come short. Many have been the proofs of their love to you, and it may be, your own hearts tell you, that while they were with you, you gave them not the proofs you should have given them of your love to them: you were wanting in your duty; you did not attend on their ministry so constantly, nor attend to it so carefully, as you should have done; your profiting did not appear, but the contrary, and this grieved the hearts of those who should have had joy of you. Will you testify your love to them now they are gone, by bewailing the removal of them? Thus at length show the value you had for them, and make up what has been wanting in the instances of your love to them. Let their deaths be lamented, to show that their lives were desired.

[2.] Because of the loss which you know you have of them, and not you only, but others also; for their usefulness is extensive, and their lives a blessing to many. The loss of a faithful minister is a public loss; we are to reckon those our best friends who are our *soul's friends*, and therefore the loss of such friends, the greatest loss of that kind.

You here have lost one who long approved himself a skilful faithful friend to your souls; one who was excellently well qualified for the service of your faith, and the help and furtherance of your holiness and joy. He was one who knew how to divide the word of truth aright, and to give each of you your portion of meat in due season. He was one who, to my knowledge, in his youth laid in

<sup>b</sup> Acts xxii. 22.

<sup>c</sup> Heb. xi. 38.

<sup>d</sup> Exod. xii. 30.

a good stock of useful learning, and which is more, knew how to make use of it. He was a scribe well instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, and could bring out of his treasury things new and old, for the improvement of the most grown Christians, and yet, both in his preaching and in his conversation, knew how to condescend and accommodate himself to the capacity of the meanest, to feed the babes with milk, and the grown men with strong meat. He preached to you in a method, that you might see the truths you are to believe, and the duties you are to do in their order, and their reference to each other, which will render the one more intelligible and the other more practicable. He preached to you in his conversation, which was of a piece with his doctrine; he was an example to the believers in every thing that is praise-worthy, and was both a burning and a shining light. That which he aimed at was your profit, as one who naturally cared for your state.

O that you would sorrow after a godly sort, would sorrow according to God, and with an eye to him, for the death of one who was so much your helper in the things of God; that you would sorrow for the loss your poor children sustain by his death, the lambs of your flock, whom he fed with food convenient for them, in his public catechising. I trust there are many of you to whom he was, through grace, a spiritual father, who by his ministry were brought savingly to Christ; such have reason to lament the taking away of one quite out of their reach, with whom they might have consulted concerning their progress in the way to heaven, but whom they can now not only not hear, but not hear from. But especially, O that you would sorrow for your sins, your carelessness and unfruitfulness under his ministry, which has separated between you and your minister, and has provoked God to deprive you of such a privilege. All our tears should be turned into this channel.

(2.) It is matter of sorrow to us who are ministers; for they were our companions, our fellow-servants, who laboured with us in the same work; our fellow-soldiers, who exposed themselves with us in the same warfare. Though St. Paul had as little need of help as any minister ever had, though the Holy Ghost was given by his hands, so that if one was removed, he knew which way to expect the raising up of another, yet the death of a faithful minister was very much his sorrow; and much more reason there is why it should be ours.

[1.] We have cause for it. Our hands are this day weak through our own infirmities, and they are weakened by such providences, so that the work is either not done, or not so well done; we are disheartened and discouraged, and drive heavily when thus our chariot-wheels are taken off. We need help, we need such help, and at every turn shall

find the want of it, and reflect with sorrow upon the withering of such a hand, as was so much our right hand.

Much is required to make an able minister of the New Testament, abundance of gifts and graces, study and experience, a good head and a good heart. It is long ere a minister grows up to maturity; the choicest fruits ripen slowly. Many hopeful buds and blossoms are blasted, and those that promised fair disappoint us, and never bring forth fruit to perfection. Many are plucked off by death, while they are yet in the blossom, they come forth like a flower, and are cut down in the beginning of their usefulness, and therefore, to be deprived of such a one as we have now lost, who was beginning, and but beginning, to be an elder in age, as well as an elder in office; who was grown by observation and experience fit to be a father to the sons of the prophets, and a very wise and tender one he was, and thereby to strengthen the hands of his brethren; who was a great example of humility, consideration, and conscientiousness; *this is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation*, especially when (according to the reason there given) among all the branches of our vine there are so few that are *strong rods for sceptres to rule*.

Let the priests the Lord's ministers mourn between the temple and the altar, for there, in the courts of the Lord's house, they will find a loss of him who was so good a helper with them in the service of the tabernacle. We have lost one who laboured in the word and doctrine, and ought therefore to be accounted worthy of double honour; of honour while he lived, the honour of being beloved; and of honour at his death, the honour of being lamented.

[2.] It will do us good. It will be for our spiritual benefit, not only to admit but to enforce the impressions of sorrow upon this occasion. By the sadness arising from this stroke of divine providence, our hearts and our lives may be made better, and we may have reason to say, *It was good for us to go to such a house of mourning*, though it is bad for us that such houses of mourning are made among us. That which makes so much against us, if we be duly affected with it, may by the grace of God be made to work for us; *out of the eater may come forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness*. We whose business it is to teach others to improve such providences, are ourselves inexcusable, if we do not lay them to heart, as the living are concerned to do.

If we sorrow aright for the death of our brethren, it will help to fix upon our minds that seriousness which is so necessary to every Christian, and, especially, to a minister, and to mortify that lightness and airiness which very much unfits for the employments and enjoyments of the spiritual and divine life. This sadness will help to compose our vain minds, and dispose them for serious work, and to

preserve that decorum upon our whole behaviour which becomes our profession, and will contribute so much to the great ends of it. That really does us good which helps to make us grave and sober-minded, and our spirits are wretchedly dissipated, if this will not do it.

It will stir us up to double our diligence in our Master's work. Do we grieve for the loss of them who are removed? Let us endeavour in some measure to make up the loss, by laying out ourselves so much the more in the service of Christ and the souls of men; let us pray better, and preach better, and live better, that we may each of us do something toward filling up the gap. In two scriptures we find the consideration of this, that death is a period to the usefulness of good men in this world, urged as an argument with the survivors to abound so much the more in honouring God: one is Ps. cxv. 17, 18. *The dead praise not the Lord, as they did while they were alive; neither any that go down into silence; praying, praising, preaching lips are closed in the grave; but we will bless the Lord, because they cannot do it, we will do it the more fervently, the more constantly, and will endeavour that it may be done by a seed, by a succession of saints, when we also are gone, from this time forth and for evermore.* The other is in Hezekiah's writing, Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19. *The grave cannot praise thee, as the pulpit does, death cannot celebrate thee, nor the congregation of the dead, as the assembly of God's Israel does; and therefore the living, the living, they shall praise thee, with so much the more life and liveliness; and that the work may not sink and die in our hands, the fathers to the children shall make known thy truth, that they may be praising God on earth, when we are praising him in heaven.*

It will put us in mind of our latter end, of the period that will then be put to our work, and the account that must then be given up of it. They are gone, and we are going, and we know not whose turn it will be to go next; probably ours who were nearest in age, who, therefore, are the more concerned to take the alarm. When our fathers are removed in a full age, we are perhaps tempted to think it will be many years before it comes to our turn to be gathered to them, and so to think of death as a thing at a distance; but when our brethren are removed, those who were brought up with us, and are of the same standing, we are bid to think of dying, not only as certain, but as very near; *Behold, the judge standeth before the door.* This forbids us to say in our hearts, *Our Lord delays his coming,* and speaks aloud in our ears, *The Lord is at hand.* Moses and Aaron are much of an age, there is but three years between them, and therefore when Aaron is dead, God puts Moses in mind of following him quickly: *Thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered,* Numb.

xxvii. 13. You commonly say to those who are but a very little younger than you, "When I die for age, you must quake for fear;" yet if you have made sure your interest in Christ, you will see cause not to quake for fear, but to sing for joy; but when those of the same age with us die, though not for age, it is a call to us to think of dying,—of dying shortly. Why may not our strength be weakened in the way, and our days shortened, as theirs were, and the number of our months be cut off in the midst? O that this consideration might be so impressed upon us who are ministers, that we might by it be quickened and engaged to apply ourselves more closely and vigorously to our great business, that we may finish comfortably and well. Our blessed Lord stirred up himself with this consideration, *I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day, for the night cometh, when no man can work.* The nearer our time draws to an end, the more concerned we are to fill it up with duty, and with that which will turn to a good account, that we may give up our account with joy. And if thus we sow in these tears, the harvest hereafter will be pleasant; if the good lessons which these providences teach us be taken out and well learned, we shall have reason to say, that *sorrow is better than laughter*; and that our loss is not only their gain, but our gain too. Our dear brother *being dead, yet speaketh*, thus speaketh, "*Therefore be ye also ready, and in order to that, be ye also busy, be always abounding in the Lord.*" We have no time to lose who have so much work to go through, and have lost so much time already. Let us not, under colour of prolonging our lives, indulge our ease, lest by so saving our lives we lose them; the more uncertain life is, the more need we have to spend it well, for that is the way to end it well; and *blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he comes shall find so doing.*

II. Sometimes the death of faithful ministers is so circumstanced, that it is sorrow upon sorrow; that was the thing St. Paul dreaded in the death of Epaphroditus, and it is what we feel at this time. God renews his witnesses against us, and multiplies our wounds.

1. When many breaches of this kind are made upon us about the same time, then we have sorrow upon sorrow. Death is always reigning in every place, and every week brings in its bills of mortality, but we reckon it a sore and signal judgment, if an epidemical distemper makes the numbers of the dead in a little time more than usual; it is true the prophets do not live for ever, the labourers must be called out of the vineyard, when they shall have accomplished as a hireling their day. But when many are removed in a little time in the same country, and those most of them in the midst of their days and usefulness, we must be very stupid if we hear not the voice of God in it. I can name about

seventeen \* dissenting ministers here within our neighbourhood, and acquaintance, who have been removed in little more than seven years; many of them I have done this mournful office for, that I am now doing for this dear brother of mine, and of them all, only two that (as I think) were above 55 years old, and those two were considerably above 80, Mr. Tallents and Mr. Cope; six or seven I take to have been about 50, and the rest under 40. And is not this sorrow upon sorrow? Have not the deaths of our brethren in the ministry been brought us by Job's messengers? *While one is yet speaking, comes in another.*

And what shall we say to these things? What is this that God has done unto us? What is it that God would have us to do? What is it that he says to us by these repeated strokes of the same rod? what is the meaning of it? and what the mind of him who has appointed it?

(1.) God does hereby plainly reprove for our former stupidity and senselessness, under the breaches of this kind that were made upon us; good men, good ministers, have been taken from us, and we have not considered it, and laid it to heart as we ought to have done; and therefore God has proceeded in this controversy with us, for when he judges he will overcome, will humble the unhumbled. If the work be not done and the point gained by one affliction, another may reasonably be expected. *Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see, but they shall see.* When one good minister has been taken away, perhaps we have been tempted to think, the matter is not great, there is *more than enough*; but God will make us know that we have none to spare, and that if we depend upon our numbers he can soon lessen them.

We have not been duly affected with the losses of this kind which other congregations have sustained, as if we were not concerned in them, nor were in danger of the like; as if our mountain stood so strong that it could not be moved, and we have thereby provoked God to come nearer us, and to make us feel the smart of that rod upon our own back, which we have not heard the voice of upon the back of others. It is a method God takes in other afflictions, those must be made to suffer who will not be made to sympathize; for sooner or later, one way or other, God will be heard, he will be heeded.

(2.) God does hereby plainly warn us of judgments coming. We are to look upon it as a sad token of his displeasure against us; nay, if we make not a right improvement of it, it is well if it prove not a bad omen of his departure from us. The removal of so many candles out of their places, is a step towards, and a threatening of, the removal of the

candlestick itself out of its place; which we have deserved, because we have *left our first love*, and have not *repented and done our first works*. God designs by these providences to awaken us out of our security, that we may not flatter ourselves with a conceit, that to-morrow will be as this day; and to stir us up to our duty, which is to prepare to meet our God; to stand in the gap which is hereby made, and make good the breach against the judgments which threaten by it to pour in upon us.

*Hear ye the Lord's controversy*, which he has with his people, and which he will plead; *Hear ye the Lord's voice*, crying to the city, to the country, and *see his name in it*. Why? How does it appear that God is contending with us? The prophet gives you an instance of it soon after, *The good man is perished out of the earth*, and *I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits—stript of my glory*. What is to be said at such a time? We must not only say, as the prophet there, *Woe is me*, but as the Psalmist on the like occasion, *Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth, the faithful fail*. When we are bemoaning our losses, we must apply ourselves to him, who is alone able to make them up; when godly, faithful people cease and fail, it is high time to cry, *Help, Lord*.

Let the good impressions of such providences as these abide with us, and let them not wear off; we are apt to be affected with them for the present, but we soon forget them, and *settle upon our lees* again, as those, who having been at ease from our youth, are desirous still to be so; which makes it necessary, that God in his providence should be still emptying us from vessel to vessel, shifting hands with us, for otherwise *our taste remaineth in us, and our scent is not changed*, Jer. xlviii. 11. Let us take heed lest, by returning to our former security, we provoke God to proceed in his controversy; but by daily prayers to God, let us endeavour to turn away his wrath, and by a continual good improvement of the many breaches of this kind that have been made upon us, let us stand between the living ministers and the dead, that this plague may be staid. *O lift up a prayer for the remnant that is left*, an earnest prayer that God would not make a full end, but would spare his people, and spare his ministers to them, according to the multitude of his mercies.

2. When we have this sorrow mingled with other sorrows; when grief for the death of our ministers is added to other grievances, so that there is a complication of griefs, then we have sorrow upon sorrow. This would have been Paul's case if Epaphroditus had died; he was now in sorrow, not so much for his own sufferings, he knew how to glory and rejoice in them, but because he was absent from the Philip-

\* Mr. Cope of Haslington, in 1704. Mr. Chorlton of Manchester, 1705. Mr. Latham of Wem, and Mr. Owen of Salop, Mr. Holland of Llostock, Mr. Long of Wrexham, in 1706. Mr. Tallents and Dr. Benion, both of Salop, and Mr. Jonathan Harvey of

Chester, 1708. Mr. Low of Knutsford, and Mr. Evans of Oswestry, in 1709. Mr. Nailor of St. Ellens, 1710. Mr. Peyton of Stafford, Mr. Brian of Newcastle, Mr. Jenkin Thomas of Wrexham, and Mr. Eaton of Manchester, in 1711. And now Mr. Lawrence, in 1712.

pians, and others of his friends who were dear to him, and wanted to know their state; and especially because he saw a general decay of serious godliness among ministers and Christians; *Some preach Christ of envy and strife, and all seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's*: this was Paul's sorrow, and if now he had lost Epaphroditus, one who *preached Christ out of love* to him, and who *naturally cared for the state of souls*, it would have been sorrow upon sorrow; and this also is our case.

How far my own present grief, which lies heavy upon me beyond what I could have thought, directed my thoughts upon this sad occasion to this melancholy theme of sorrow upon sorrow, I shall not say, the heart best knows its own bitterness, and feels most from its own burthen; but upon many accounts of common concern, we may truly call this sorrow upon sorrow.

(1.) The abounding of atheism and infidelity, vice and profaneness, in our land is our sorrow; we behold the transgressors and are grieved; I am sure we ought to be so, to see them so numerous, so impudent; and rivers of tears should run down our eyes, because there are so few that keep God's law, and so many who break it. The general corruption of men's principles and manners, the abounding of impiety and immorality, and the inefficacy of the endeavours used for reformation, are matter of sorrow to all good people; righteous souls are vexed from day to day, as Lot's was, with the filthy conversation of the unrighteous; and we hope there is a remnant who mourn in secret, and cover their faces, for that wickedness which is committed openly, and goes barefaced, that sigh and cry for the abominations of the land, that blush before God for that wickedness for which they that are guilty of it will not blush before men. It is sad to see and to hear how God's name is profaned, his law broken, his word vilified, his sabbath polluted, his creatures abused, how men wrong and abuse, how they *bite and devour, one another*.

And if this be a sorrow, as certainly it is, the taking away of those from the midst of us, who were, in their places, God's witnesses against the wickedness of the wicked, who helped to put vice out of countenance, and to make iniquity stop her mouth; who, by the Spirit of the Lord, lifted up a standard against this enemy who comes in like a flood; the silencing of the faithful watchmen, who warned the wicked in God's name to turn from his wicked way, must needs be sorrow upon sorrow. Men of probity and sincerity could never be worse spared than now, when men speak vanity every one to his neighbour, and there are so few who can be confided in.

(2.) The decay of serious piety, among those who make a profession of it, is our sorrow. It may justly grieve us to see not only how iniquity abounds, but how the love of many waxes cold; love to their

God, to their Bibles, to their brethren; devout affections ebb and abate; the *kindness of our youth* is forgotten, and that of *our espousals*. It is our sorrow, to see so little of the power of godliness among those who retain the form of it; to see family worship neglected, sabbath time trifled away, Bibles and good books seldom looked into, religious conference forgotten and quite laid aside, solemn assemblies indifferently attended, and the word preached carelessly heard. It is sad to see how little there is among us of the pious zeal and strictness of the good old puritans; how the things that remain are ready to die, and our works are not found filled up before God; but what a woful deficiency there is of what should be, and a woful degeneracy from what has been, among professors.

And if this be a sorrow, surely it may well be reckoned sorrow upon sorrow, when those are taken away by death, in whom so much of serious piety was kept up, and by whose means we might hope to see it, through the grace of God, in some measure revived. It adds to our grief, to see a family beheaded, and by that means broken up and scattered, in which God's name was so constantly called upon, his word read and opened, and his praises sung, now, when in so many houses the altar of the Lord is broken down, or gone to decay. When we have been bewailing the defection and backsliding of many who began in the Spirit, then to follow those to their graves, who not only still held fast their integrity themselves, but we hoped might have been instrumental to reduce and recover those that were gone astray; this may well be called, sorrow upon sorrow.

(3.) The contempt cast upon the religious assemblies which we adhere to, and in which we think we have met with God, is our sorrow. It is made the character of those whom God has distinguishing favours in reserve for, that they are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, to whom the reproach of it is a burthen; and a great many solemn assemblies there are among us, on which we have reason to say, God has put honour, that yet are loaded with reproach, and exceedingly filled with the scorning of those who are at ease. The assemblies of those who we know to be united by holy faith and love to Christ, and through him to his church, are reproached as by schism cut off from the church, and therefore from Christ and the covenant, and the hope of salvation, for no other reason but because their ministers were ordained as Timothy was, by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, and not by a diocesan bishop. The assemblies of those who we know to be peaceable and quiet in the land, are reproached without any colour of reason, like the assemblies of the primitive Christians, as factious, and seditious, and hurtful to kings and provinces. The masters of those assemblies, though we know them to be ready and mighty in the Scriptures, skilful in the word of

righteousness, yet are reproached by many as unlearned and ignorant men. Many such as these are the reproaches of the solemn assemblies, which are our sorrow, because when thus, like Nazareth, they are put into an ill name, unthinking people are prejudiced against them, and are easily persuaded that no good thing can come out of them. There is a late reproach put upon our assemblies by the law, which makes it highly penal for one in any place of trust or power to be seen in them: and this reproach adds to our brethren; *Hear, O our God, for we are suspected, we are despised*, and both without cause; and this is our sorrow; we quarrel not with those who give us this hard treatment, we pray God to forgive them, but *as a sword in our bones* are these reproaches.

And now to have those taken away who were so much the glory of our assemblies, and helped to answer them who reproached us, and to put to silence their ignorance; to be stript of our ornaments now, of those whose good report of all men made them a credit to us, even our enemies themselves being judges, this is sorrow upon sorrow: for we know not what to say when we are asked, What will ye do now? where is your glory? but that, *our God is still our glory, our everlasting glory*.

(4.) The judgments of God that threaten our land, and the difficult trembling posture of the affairs of the protestant churches abroad, are our sorrow; it grieves us to see the desolations of the sanctuary, to hear the groans of God's Israel in Egypt; by whom shall Jacob arise, for he is small, and his interests neglected? The enemies of the reformed churches are many and mighty, and violent against them; their friends few and feeble, and cool toward them. It is our sorrow that there are such heats and ferments among ourselves. We have reason to fear the desolations which a kingdom divided against itself is threatened with: we are biting and devouring one another, widening matters in difference, and exasperating one another's spirits; *firebrands, arrows, and death* are thrown about, and discord, among other tares, sown in God's field; all who wish well to the honour of Christ, and the interests of his kingdom among men, grieve to see it.

And is it not then sorrow upon sorrow, at this time to have one removed from us who was and would have been a peace-maker with God by his prayers, who stood in the gap as an intercessor, to turn away his wrath, who had an interest in heaven, and improved it for a sinful people, who was and would have been a peace-maker with men too, by his Christian temper and moderation, who studied the things which make for peace, who placed his religion in the essentials of it, and there spent his zeal? Now the dividing spirit so much prevails, it is sad to lose one who was of such a healing spirit. Now so many are adding oil to our flames, which is our sorrow, it is upon sorrow to see the hand withered that

was bringing water to them, and the earthen vessel broken that held that water. It is ill with the patient, if, when his disease is at the height, those physicians are removed who best understood his case, and the method of his cure.

Let us now make some application of this:

1. See what this world is; it is a *vale of tears*, it is a *Bockim*, a place of *weepers*, and we must expect no other but a sorrowful passage through it. It is well if in Christ we have peace and joy; in the world we must have trouble and grief. In the upper world there is a perfect and perpetual serenity, it is all clear and calm there; but in these lower regions the clouds are still returning after the rain, and we must expect sorrow upon sorrow. Look which way we will, and we see the tears of the oppressed, some upon one account, and some upon another, and many times they have no comforter. We see families in tears, congregations in tears, churches, nations in tears. How melancholy is the state of human life! What a constant series of griefs are we attended with through this wilderness! The end of one trouble is commonly the beginning of another, *Deep calls unto deep*. Nay, troubles often come in company, and the beginning of one is the preface to another; and we are not to think it strange, it is what others have had experience of, and we have had notice of.

The larger our acquaintance is, and the more friends we have, the more happy we think ourselves, and we have cause to do so; what greater pleasure or comfort is there on earth, than an agreeable friendship? And yet the more we have of this comfort, the more sorrow we are exposed to; the more dear friends we have, the more we have to sympathize with, and the more we have to part with; if it adds something to our pleasure that we rejoice with those we love when they rejoice, it adds more to our pain, that by the same rule we weep with them when they weep; but considering how many more men's griefs are than their joys in this world, and that in both we must be partakers with our friends, we must conclude that by the increase of our friendships, our joys rise not in proportion to our griefs, unless that we conceive a secret pleasure in contributing something toward the comfort of our afflicted friends and their families, by our sincere and affectionate sympathy with them.

And is this world so full of sorrows, *sorrows upon sorrows*? We see it is. What is there in it then that should court either our love to it or our stay in it? Why should our affections be set upon good things beneath, when we see them liable to so many sorrowful changes? Why should they not be set upon good things above, which though they may perhaps admit of an endless increase, yet know no change, nor are in any danger of being lost? Why should we be fond of a continuance here, where the longer we stay the more sorrows we shall have to share in, and not



rather covet to remove to that world, whence sorrow is for ever banished, where all tears shall be wiped away from our eyes, and joy upon joy shall draw out the bliss parallel to the line of eternity itself.

2. Let one sorrow help to make another sorrow that comes with it the more tolerable, and to prepare and fit us for another that may come after it. As the more we do for God, the more we may do, one duty will fit us for another; so the more we bear from God, the more we may bear, and the better we may bear it, for *tribulation works patience*. Those who have not known sorrow, find it hard to be reconciled to it, and are apt to fret at it, and to double it by struggling with it; but those who have experienced sorrow upon sorrow, like their Master, who was a *man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*, can converse familiarly with their afflictions, whereby not only the terror of them is taken off, but abundance of advantage is gained by them.

Let the frequent returns of our sorrows keep us from security, and keep up in us a lively expectation of trouble, that, let it come ever so suddenly, it may be no surprise to us. We must never say, surely this trouble will excuse us from another, or that now we have had our share; no, it is still less than what we deserve, and perhaps less than what we need. We should rather argue, Have I had this sorrow? what good use shall I make of it, that by it I may be the better prepared for the next? If our sorrows wean us from the world, and loosen our hearts from it; if they make us serious and thoughtful of another world; if they endear Christ to us, and make him more precious, by giving us an experimental acquaintance with the powers and pleasures of his grace; then when sorrow comes upon sorrow we may bear them cheerfully. *Patience works experience, and experience a hope that makes not ashamed.*

And if we thus improve our sorrows, though as to the troubles themselves of this present time, we must remember that we are but girding on the harness, and must not boast as though the warfare were accomplished, and we had put it off; yet as to any real hurt or injury that the troubles can do us, we may boast as though we had put off the harness, for in all these things, not only we shall be, but we are already, more than conquerors through him who loved us and died for us.

3. When God pursues one sorrow with another, let us follow the sorrow for affliction with a godly sorrow for sin, and that is a sorrow upon sorrow which will be an evidence for us that the affliction comes from love, is designed for our good, and does us the good that is designed us; and will prepare us for such a deliverance out of our affliction, as will be a mercy indeed to us.

When we sorrow for the death of our friends, particularly of our ministers, we should at the same

time sorrow for our sins, by which we have provoked God thus to contend with us. We are therefore deprived of the comfort of our relations, because we have not done the duty of them; when, therefore, we lament the effect, we should lament the cause.

4. When we have sorrow upon sorrow upon the account of affliction, let us not by our own folly add any more sorrow to it; nor by the productions of the root of bitterness in our hearts, make the bitter cup to be more bitter to us than really it is. If, in any distress, we trespass yet more against the Lord, as that king Abaz did, 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. we make the distress more than double. *Sin upon sorrow* will be worse than *sorrow upon sorrow*, and will be wormwood and gall in the affliction and misery.

Now you here have sorrow for the death of your minister. If you should grow cool to holy ordinances, as if your religion were buried with your minister, or as if no other minister could teach you, and show you the way to Christ and heaven now he is gone; if this should be made use of as a pretence for your carelessness and lukewarmness in the service of God, that you have not the minister you have been used to, and so your hearts be hardened by the providence that should soften them, then it will indeed be sorrow upon sorrow. But I hope better things of you, my brethren, and that we shall yet have joy concerning you; that as those who have been so well taught, and so long under the inspection of such an overseer, you will continue your zeal in religion, and your love and unity among yourselves, and we may *hear of your affairs, that your conversation is as becomes the gospel*, and that *ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel*.

5. Let us study to answer God's end in visiting us thus with sorrow upon sorrow, and accommodate ourselves to the intentions of these providences. By the sadness of our countenances on such occasions as these let our hearts be made better, every way better. Every rod has a voice, which we are concerned to hear, and understand the meaning of; every affliction is sent upon an errand, and he who sends the errand expects to have an answer. What answer will you return this day to this messenger? or rather, to God's call by it.

This sorrow is appointed us, this sorrow upon sorrow, to put us upon considering the uncertainty of the continuance of our opportunities; *Yet a little while is the light with you*; places have their time for enjoying the gospel, which will come to an end, and then other places have their turn. Ministers are burning and shining lights, but it is only for a season that we rejoice in their light; which is a good reason why we should walk and work while we have the light, while it is yet called to-day, because the night comes, and before the night comes, wherein no man can work.

It is designed to bring us off from looking at men, and instruments, as though by their own power they could do us service, or had done it; no, they are only the earthen vessels in which the treasure was deposited, and they are broke and thrown aside, to give us a sensible conviction, that the excellency of the power is of God, and not of them. We are thus taught to cease from man, from wise and good and useful men, whose breath at their best state is in their nostrils, and will not be there long. Let our dependence therefore be not on them, but on Christ, who makes them that to us that they are; let us sit down with delight under the shadow, not of these gourds, that come up in a night, and perish in a night, but of that Rock of Ages that abides for ever. Let us not bind up our religion, and the comfort of it, in our ministers; for God therefore shows us the end of their conversation among us, that we may cleave so much the closer to Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and will be the same to the successors in the ministry, that he was to their predecessors, and make them the same to us, if it be not our own fault.

6. Let us be earnest with God in prayer that he would not proceed in his controversy with us, and that we may not have any more sorrow upon sorrow of this kind. Go forth to meet the Lord in the way of his judgments, and humble yourselves under his mighty hand, and pray and seek his face. He expects his praying people should now appear in the breach, to turn away his wrath, and justly *wonders* if at such a time there be *no intercessor*; and shall not each of us then be intercessors, as the prophet Ezekiel was when he fell upon his face, and cried with a loud voice, as one in earnest, *Ah, Lord God, wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?* And as the prophet Amos was, when he prayed, *O Lord God, cease, I beseech thee; by whom shall Jacob arise, for he is small.*

O that by this providence we might be stirred up to pray more, and pray better, to pray more earnestly, as Christ himself did when he was in his agony. When we have lost a praying friend, we are concerned the more to pray for ourselves. Pray that the light of God's countenance may shine upon us through these dark dispensations, and that whatever friends and helpers he takes away from us, he would not himself turn away from us, nor take away his mercy and his truth.

7. Even when we have sorrow upon sorrow, yet let us not sorrow as those who have no hope; but take hold of the comforts and encouragements which God hath provided for his own people, in their multiplied and most aggravated sorrows, that they may not be unmixed sorrows, and unallayed. As the righteous have hope in their death, so have their friends also who are left behind in tears.

(1.) We have hope concerning him whom we have

lost, that he is removed unspeakably to his own advantage, for to those to whom to live is Christ, to die is not only no loss, but great gain. This country has a mighty loss of him, but he has no loss of it, who is gone to the better country, that is, the heavenly, to better work, and better pleasures, and better friends. Those are safely and honourably lodged who are received into the mansions in our Father's house, those everlasting habitations; those have a good repose, and sleep sweetly, who sleep in Jesus. What honours here are comparable to theirs, to whom our Lord Jesus says, *Well done, good and faithful servant*; or what pleasure comparable to theirs who *enter into the joy of their Lord*. Let this yield us pleasing thoughts when we are afflicting ourselves for the loss of one we loved. We sorrow for the body, that that is lodged in a land of darkness and silence; but the soul is the man, and that is gone thither where its eyes are opened to an everlasting light, and its lips opened in songs of everlasting praise; and therefore if we loved him we would rejoice. He who so often complained of knowing but in part, and prophesying but in part, is now made perfect, and sees face to face.

(2.) We have hopes that God will do our souls good by this providence, that he will sanctify it to us, and make it a means of our sanctification; and that the impressions of it will not be soon lost, will never be quite lost. You of this place and neighbourhood will, I hope, be quickened hereby to consider your latter end, and with the utmost diligence to prepare for it. You see, that in the midst of life we are in death, and that we are often obliged to remove hence upon very short warning. When you saw your minister last in the pulpit, and heard him discourse so excellently of the intercession of Christ, you little thought it was the last sermon you should hear him preach, and that within a few days you should see him laid in the dust; but so it proves; and God by it calls aloud to you, *Therefore be ye also ready*, be ye always ready, for you see that *at such an hour as you think not, the Son of man comes*.

And as this providence will I hope, through grace, do you good, by quickening you to prepare for death, so I hope it may be of use to you, to help you above the fear of death: those who are ready to die should be willing to die, and they have the more reason to be so, when they see their friends go cheerfully before them down into the darksome valley of the shadow of death, and even then fear no evil. Your ministers who, while they lived, showed you the way to heaven through the paths of life, when they die show you the way thither through the regions of death, and go before you through that Jordan, as the priests did before Israel bearing the ark of the covenant. Be ye, therefore, followers of them, who are now *through faith and patience inheriting the promises*.

(3.) We have hope, that God will take care of the beheaded family, that is most sensibly touched by this breach. He was one who blessed his household, that was every way a blessing to it, and therefore his death is killing to it, we sorrow with them, and grieve for their loss; but we depend upon the word of God, that he will be a Husband to the widow, and a Father to the fatherless children; *Jehovah-jireh—The Lord will provide*; and *in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen*, Gen. xxii. 14.; the orphans who are left with him, shall not be left by him, nor left comfortless, but he will come unto them, and take care of them; and let the widow trust in him, and she shall not be made ashamed of her hope. To the aged mother likewise, who has lived to see sorrow upon sorrow, God will be better than ten sons, than ten such sons.

(4.) We have hope, that God will provide well for the congregation, and that that shall not be destitute and dispersed, as sheep having no shepherd, but they and theirs shall still be led into the green pastures, and fed beside the still waters. You have been loving and respectful to your minister, and many of you have been his comfort and hope, and I trust will be his crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord; and you have reason to expect that God will send you another faithful guide in the good ways of the Lord. I have reason to think he has a blessing in reserve for you, by which he will carry on his good work among you. St. Paul, when he was in prison, comforted himself with this, that though he was bound, the word of the Lord was not bound, and when faithful ministers are laid in their graves, this may be our comfort, though they are buried the word of the Lord is not buried. When you change your minister, you do not change your Master; you shall have another preacher, but thanks be to God, not another Bible, or another gospel.

(5.) We have hope, that though we have parted with a dear friend in sorrow, with many such in sorrow upon sorrow, yet the day is coming when we shall meet again, shall meet with them all again in

joy, in everlasting joy. The hope of this gives the strongest allay to our griefs. *If in this life only we had hope in Christ*, and were to fetch our reliefs in such cases as these, from within the confines of time, *we were of all men the most miserable*; but we have hope in Christ, that those who now sleep in him, he will shortly bring with him; and will bring us to meet them; we who remain and are left behind for a while, shall be brought to be companions with them in the kingdom, as we have been in the patience and tribulation, of Jesus Christ. *We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come*, and in the believing expectation thereof we comfort ourselves and one another.

Now God calls to weeping and mourning, it is a comfort to us to see so many sad countenances and wet eyes in this solemn assembly, for thus we answer God's calls; but when God calls us to joy, into his joy, what a pleasant sight will it be to see the *general assembly and church of the first-born*, and ourselves in it, and not one weeping eye, or dejected countenance, or sorrowful spirit, among all the holy myriads. There shall be no sorrow, nor any occasion for it; nay, there shall be everlasting joy, and everlasting cause for it; the streams ever running, because their springs ever full and overflowing.

Our assembly is now breaking up and scattering, and it is not likely that we should ever be all together again in this world; but this is our comfort, if we be found the faithful followers of the Lord Jesus, we shall shortly be gathered together unto him, with all the saints, and none but saints, and saints made perfect: and that assembly shall never be broken up or scattered; we shall meet and part no more. The best we can here hope for is, to go in and out with the sheep of Christ, and to find pasture; but if we can but get to heaven, we shall be pillars in the temple of our God, and shall go no more out. The Lord bring us all safe thither in due time; and in the mean time the Lord watch over us, *The Lord watch between us, when we are absent the one from the other*, Gen. xxxi. 42.

## A CONCISE ACCOUNT

OF THE

## LIFE OF MR. SAMUEL LAWRENCE.

He was born in *Wem*, a little market-town in Shropshire, and, as appears by the register, was baptized Nov. 5, 1661. He was the only son of Mr. William Lawrence, and Sarah his wife. His good mother is

still living. His father was a very eminent Christian, and much respected and valued by all good people who knew him. My father preached his funeral sermon at *Wem*, Feb. 26, 1694-5, on Luke xxiii. 28.