

## SERMON VII.\*

Luke 18, 1—8.

*And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint ; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man : And there was a widow in that city ; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while : but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man ; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them ?*

**M**Y purpose is not to give you a particular explication of this parable. The design of it is sufficiently seen in the application of it, which our Saviour here makes. All that I shall at present do shall be to shew you, with all possible brevity, the strength of the reasoning which our Saviour here useth, from the importunity and success of this widow ; in order to

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encourage our addresses to God, and a continuance therein without fainting. And his argument to this purpose may be seen to be very strong and cogent if we consider these two things in the general.

I. The parity of reason between the case he argueth from, and that which he argueth to.

II. The superiority of reason, which is in the latter case, above the former. For so we must understand him to argue, partly *a priori*, and partly *a fortiori*. And the strength of the argument both ways we shall endeavour to make out unto you.

III. We shall make application of the whole.

I. I am to consider the parity of reason between these two cases; which you may conceive especially in these four things.

1. That here was distress in the one case, and there is distress in the other. This widow comes to this judge in a very distressed case, as it should seem, though it be not particularly expressed; only it appears she was very much grieved, and that there was a great deal of wrong done her. And so in the other case, the elect of God are always very much injured; and they sustain a great deal of wrong from this evil world, in which they are. And surely if this unjust judge was moved with the distress of this suppliant, there is a great deal of reason to suppose, that distress will be moving in this case also; and that the elect will be heard, when they make their cries to heaven, urged by their own distresses.

2. There appears to have been justice in the one case, as we are sure there is justice in the other. This widow's did appear to be a just cause. She comes with this request to the judge, that he would avenge her of her adversary. The word *Ἐνδίκησον*, there used, signifies, Right me of my adversary. She came to petition a matter of right, and all that she desired was to have right done her. And there is a great deal of right in the other case also. "It is a righteous thing with God (says the apostle) 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 with his mighty angels." 2 Thes. 1. 6, 7. And again,

3. There was importunity in the one case, and there is importunity in the other. Why then should not success be hoped to correspond in this case, as well as that? This widow was so urgent, that the judge was sensible of a grievance in it; and found a necessity upon himself to do her right, lest he should be wearied by her importunity. The elect too are represented,

as crying night and day ; that is, the loud voice of their prayers is not by fits, only now and then, but is continued, and incessant ; as night and day take in the whole complex of time. And do you think then, saith our Saviour, that God will not hear their cry ? Besides,

4. There is an obligation by office to do right, both in the one case, and in the other. The person, to whom this woman applied herself, was a judge in the city. Now it is known, that in several of the more eminent cities of Israel, there were constituted stated judges, to whom all persons might have recourse, and bring their grievances, in order to their being redressed. So that this woman doth not come to a person unconcerned. She does not request, that an occasional kindness might be done her ; as one might request such a thing of any one, when in necessity : but she comes to an appointed person, to one who by his office was obliged to right her. And God hath been pleased to take upon himself such an office, and to make himself known by the name of the Judge of all the earth ; that all might know whither to apply, and to whom they may appeal and address themselves. And why is not right to be expected in this case, as well as in the other ? So far this parable gives us ground to argue from a parity of reason. But,

II. It gives us ground also for arguing from a superiority of reason too, in sundry respects. As,—In respect of the supplicants in the one case, and the other :—in respect of the persons supplicated in the one case, and the other : and—in respect of the supplication itself in the former case, and the latter compared.

1. There is very prevailing and much stronger reason in the latter case, than in the former ; if we consider the supplicants in both, and compare them. In the former case you have a poor woman ; and here we are to consider,

(1.) That she was a single woman, only one person who comes to make her complaint to this judge : but in the other case you have a community, the whole body of the elect. How vast is the disproportion here ! This great body joining in one cry, surely that must needs be unspeakably more prevailing ! And,

(2.) (For we can but speak shortly to so many things as are before us) This was but an ordinary woman, of an inferior rank, by any thing that appears ; that is, she is not mentioned here under any remarkable particular character, that might add weight to her cause and suit : but this community is a choice community ; the elect ; a community of very peculiar persons,

that are severed from the rest of men, and distinguished by God's own special seal set upon them. As when God's portion in the several tribes was spoken of, there were sealed of such a tribe, so many thousands; and of such a tribe, so many thousands. Rev. 7. 4. &c. All God's elect ones, are sealed ones; they carry a mark of honour upon them. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." 2 Tim. 2. 19. And,

(3.) The supplicant was unrelated to him, to whom she makes her supplication. We do not find, that she pretended to any relation to him at all; only comes to him as the judge of her city. But in the other case, the supplicants are God's elect; his own peculiar people that he had taken, and made nigh unto himself: "called, and chosen, and faithful," as you have those expressions put together in Scripture. Rev. 17. 14. And do not we think then, that a more especial regard will be had here? Besides,

2. There is a great superiority of reason in arguing from the one case to the other, if we consider the persons supplicated; or to whom the addresses are made in each case. In the general, in one case it is man; in the other, it is God. And particularly,

(1.) In the former case it was a wicked profane person, to whom the address was made; one that did neither fear God, nor regard man: good to no one, neither to God nor man; a vile wretched creature, wrapt up within himself; who studied, and consulted nothing but his own ease, and peace; having no fear of God before his eyes, nor any regard to man. But in the other case, you have the holy God addressed to; whose natural, essential holiness, is a perpetual law and obligation to him, to do always that which is best. His essential rectitude cannot but do such things, as have an agreeable rectitude in them to his own very nature.

(2.) In the one case it was a merciless man, that was applied to; in the other, a merciful God. How much stronger is the reason! This judge was a man who had no mercy, no pity to any one, but to himself. He took some pity of himself indeed, that he might not be wearied out with continual clamours and cries; otherwise, it seems, his heart knew no pity, there were no bowels of compassion rolling, or working in him. But in the other case, it is the Father of mercies who is addressed, and appealed to. It is he with whom there is so abundant pity, and kindness; so strong a propension and inclination to do good to the necessitous and miserable, only because his will inclines and leads him thereunto: the Spring and Fountain of all

that pity and mercy, that is any where to be found, diffused among his creatures. If parents pity their children; if there be bowels gathering in any towards the afflicted and distressed; from what spring, from what fountain did all this proceed? All must come from some original or other; and they can be derived from no higher, neither are they to be derived from any lower, than this great Father of mercies. And what! shall not he hear his elect? And again,

(3.) It was, in the former case, an unjust man that was supplicated; here it is the just and righteous God. As his holiness doth oblige him in general to do that, which is right and fit to be done; his justice, as a particular attribute in his general character, inclines him in this case to administer, and execute justice. As he hath been pleased mercifully himself to lay down a rule and law of mercy, in reference to those that are his (though it be impossible that God can injure a man in any thing, yet it is possible that men can injure one another; and very certain also that those are the worst used by the world, who have such a near relation to him, and whom he hath chosen and gathered out of the world) so here in this case, when there is a proper object of vindictive justice, shall not the Judge of all the earth do right, to whom righteousness belongs as part of his peculiar glory? And then again,

3. There is, in respect of the supplication on the one hand, and on the other, a great superiority, and triumphant prevalence of reason. For, in the former case, consider,

(1.) The matter of the petition of this widow; and that was only a private good, that she sought for herself: and consider also the petition of the elect of God. They have all one common concernment, wherein the interest of God is involved with theirs. So that whatsoever they supplicate for, as the elect of God, must needs be a matter that is so far public; that is, wherein they all agree, and in which their hearts and desires do meet, and concur. It is one thing for a particular person to desire to be gratified in some particular, private concernments; and another thing to insist upon such matters as are common to us, with all the elect of God. And this it is to be supposed is the matter of the supplications of the elect unto God in this case. It is that, wherein all the elect do concentre and wherein all their desires do meet.

(2) Look to the manner, and style of the supplication; on the one part, and on the other. This woman comes in her own name, but the supplications of the elect of God run in another style; they come all in the name of the great Mediator, and Intercessor. And is there not unspeakably more rea-

son, that we should expect their supplications to prevail? They come in the name of him, who is most nearly related to the Judge, and to them. "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 1 John 2. 1. It is said indefinitely, with the Father: not of his, or our Father; but the common Father of him, and us, as we are to understand it. And since with him we have such an Advocate, shall we not hope to prevail? Again,

(3.) Consider the principle of the one's supplication, and that of the other. We must suppose this woman's supplication to be dictated by her own sense of the urgency, and necessity of her case; and the unrelievableness of it by any other way than that of addressing herself to the known judge. In short, it was her own private spirit that dictated her supplication; for she alone knew her own need, felt her own necessity. But the prayers of all the elect of God have another principle: When they know not what to pray for, they are furnished with matter, and with sighs and groans at once. Rom. 8. 26. There is a spirit appointed on purpose, known by the name of the "Spirit of grace and supplications;" whose business it is to indite requests for the elect of God, and to strive and to wrestle with him: which is strongly moving at the same time in their own breasts; so as that their hearts, and the heart of God, as it were, are united, and joined by that Spirit. Shall they not then hope to prevail? They may say, when they are putting up such prayers as are the common sense of all the elect of God; "Lord, I do not speak of myself now. Thou hast taught me to pray. This prompts me to it, and puts me upon it; and I had never prayed so, nor uttered such cries: and such desires had not entered into my heart, if thou hadst not put them there." And shall not God hear his own elect offering up petitions of his own bespeaking? And desires of his own creating shall not he answer? Doth he stir up desires on purpose to disappoint them? or, will he make his people refuse to pray, by denying their petitions, and casting their prayers back upon their hands? And then,

(4.) Consider the end of one's supplication, and that of the other. The end that this woman aimed at, was nothing but self-advantage, to be relieved herself; but the end of the elect of God in their supplications, is somewhat wherein their interest is jointly concerned with his in reference to those great concernments, which belong to the whole body. They know he hath a concern twisted with theirs; and so can speak it, with Daniel, as the real sense of their hearts, "Do, defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city, and thy people

are called by thy name." Dan. 9. 19. This is the common sense of all the people of God: "Thou hast not been ashamed to be called our God. Thou hast taken us into a near relation unto thee. It is a grievous thing to be twitted with our God. It is as a sword in our bones to have it said to us, Where is your God? Thy concernments and ours are one; do therefore, and defer not for thine own name's sake." In this strain do all the supplications of the elect run. So that in all these respects you see there is a great superiority of reason, if such a widow should succeed well in her private request to such a judge, why all the elect of God should much more succeed in the requests, which they are day and night making to the great Lord of heaven and earth. And therefore,

III. Briefly to apply all this, we learn;

1. How great a privilege it is to have this matter clear to us, that we are of the elect of God; and how much therefore we are concerned to make our calling, and election sure; for then we find ourselves to belong to a community, that are continually praying prayers which shall be sure to prevail. And how great a privilege, how blessed a thing is this! Methinks when we understand how certainly the elect of God shall be heard, who are crying to him night and day; we should be at this work, night and day, poring into our hearts, till we are certain of this, that we are the elect of God. Then we shall be sure to put up all prosperous and acceptable prayers, when they are all of the same sense, and run in the same channel, as theirs are wont to do. And again,

2. We are to collect hence, that the elect of God, as long as they continue in this world, are to bear the character of praying ones. To be acted by a spirit of prayer, and to have continually a praying disposition, is characteristical of the elect of God, who are gathered in from among the common refuse of a sinful world. Therefore we had need to look well to ourselves concerning this thing. How stand our hearts Godward? Are they formed unto prayers? Is it become even a spiritually natural thing to us to pray? As natural as breathing is to a living man, so natural a thing is praying to the new creature, and as agreeable. The elect are supplicants day and night. The great business of their lives is prayer. This is that, to which the heart of an elect person doth impel him; so far as he is himself, and hath the true genius and spirit working in him, which is common to all the elect of God, and also peculiar to them. And again, we are to learn hence,

3. In how wretched a case they must needs be, who are the stated, and habitual enemies of the church of God in the world.

It is a fearful condition that such men are in, to have all the elect of God crying against them, night and day. What will become of this matter at last? Who, that considers the case, would not dread to be found in such a condition as these are in? to be one against whom all the elect of God are joining their requests, night and day, and exhibiting complaints! For they do in common pray against the enemies of the name, and interest of God: and so every one is involved, and the cry of this whole community goes against each individual; that is, supposing them to persevere in a course of enmity to the interest of our Lord, and his Christ. So that this might make any heart to tremble, to think what this is like to come to, and what it must needs infer. What fearful storms of wrath and vengeance will be plucked down at length upon their heads, against whom all the elect of God are continually joining their requests! And, in the last place,

4. We see hence, how unreasonable a thing it is to be despondent in prayer, or to faint in this duty, supposing that the things we mainly insist upon are the common concerns of the elect of God. This being supposed we pray securely. Indeed if we vainly and unwarrantably set our hearts upon this or that particular thing, that would gratify ourselves; and nothing will serve our turn, but that we be so and so gratified; we may pray, and pray, and all to little purpose: for there can be no acceptable prayer that is not the prayer of faith; and that can be no prayer of faith, which goeth beyond the bounds of the promise. Therefore, if I pray for that, which was never promised, I may thank myself if I succeed not.

There are some things that cannot be the matter of a universal, absolute promise; being things which are in themselves of an uncertain, and variable nature: as all such things as have no intrinsic goodness of their own, but may sometimes be good to particular persons, and sometimes not. For circumstances may so vary the case, that the good that is in them may be preponderated by a far greater evil, if they should at that time be given. And whatsoever is a good of this nature; that is, good or not good, according as circumstances are, which often vary; it is apparent cannot be the matter of an absolute promise: for supposing circumstances so to vary, as that this should become an evil, you would then have evil to be the matter of a promise, which is contradictious and absurd. But since it is possible, that external or worldly good things, yea, and some also that may be externally subservient to religion, may in some circumstances do more hurt to the people of God, who does with a gracious care preside over their actions, and all things that have any re-

spect to them, and who is best able to judge; they cannot, therefore, be the matter of his absolute promise. These things may be more hurtful, than gainful, in such and such circumstances; and he sees how to do them more good by the want of such things, than by the having of them. A less good, when compared with a greater, is then to pass under the notion of evil; and it would, I say, be unreasonable to suppose evil to be the matter of a promise. And where any thing of that nature is not promised absolutely, but with a reserved latitude to the wisdom, and goodness of our great Lord, and Ruler; our faith can be exercised no otherwise about them, than according to the tenour of such promises: that is, we may believe we shall have such and such things, if God seeth good; but if he seeth not good, he will deny, or withhold them, even in mere goodness and faithfulness to us.

But then in such things as are absolutely promised to all the elect of God, there we may give room and scope to our faith. And it is an unreasonable thing to be at all desponding concerning the matter of such prayers: as it is, with respect to others also, no less unreasonable to admit the least doubt, that we shall have such things if they be best for us; and what God in his unerring wisdom discerns will be for our advantage. Therefore let us settle this apprehension with ourselves, of how great concernment it is to us in prayer, to insist on such things, as are properly of common concern to the whole fraternity of the elect; and therein to take heed of any diffidence, or distrust.

Great and glorious things are promised to be the portion of God's elect in this world, at his own appointed time and season; but he hath not told us when that shall be. However we may, with this peremptory faith, go unto God in prayer, that he will make the kingdoms of the earth, the kingdoms of our Lord, and his Christ, who shall reign for ever and ever; that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established, above all the mountains; that there shall be new heavens, and a new earth, wherein shall dwell righteousness. But we make all this matter a private business, if we go and cry; "Oh let it be so now! let it be in my time, that mine eyes may see it!" especially if we peremptorily insist upon it; without reservation or submission to the supreme wisdom and will. Whereas if we pray in general, that such things may be; our hearts should be full of hope, faith, and joy, in the apprehension that thus it shall be; and we cannot be without success, since it is the common sense of all the elect of God.

And in matters, which respect the particular concernments

of our souls, see that they be things of absolute necessity, and that fall within the consent of all the community. Let us pray against the body of sin and death ; that we may have grace kept alive, and maintained and improved ; that we may grow, and be carried on from strength to strength, till we reach "the measure of a perfect man in Christ Jesus." This is the common sense of all the elect ; and our prayers fall in with theirs, who have been wont to cry out against the body of sin and death, as the great and most violent enemy they would be rid of. We may then be sure that our prayers shall have effect, and not be lost ; and that God will certainly hear them.

If we are praying for the divine presence ; he hath promised that he will never leave, nor forsake those that cleave to him. Heb. 13. 5. Whatever he may do to people in common, he will never break the bond between himself, and that soul which is one of his elect ; and when they cry, "Lord never leave me, nor forsake me !" they shall be sure to be heard. When we pray for the divine presence to be afforded more especially to us, in reference to some special case, or season of trouble and trial, this is what God will not fail to do. If his presence be desired, I say, as to any special duty ; so it will be, and God will hear us.

I hope you are desirous, and earnest in your prayers to God, for his more immediate presence, in reference to that special season of your approaching to the Lord's table. Sure all the elect of God have been wont to do so, praying and striving that they might at such times and seasons meet with God ; that there might be a real intercourse, between their souls and him (whom they love) to such a degree as to him seems best. Why, God will hear all these cries, that are common to us, with all the people of God ; and such prayers being directed to him, shall not be in vain. Therefore we should take heed, upon these accounts, that we faint not.

We must know that fainting may be either when faith languisheth, or desire. It is faint praying, when we pray as if we cared not whether we prayed or no. The word *εκκακωμι* here rendered faint, in our text, is the same with that, which elsewhere is rendered weary. Let us not, *εκκακωμι*, be weary in well-doing ; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not : (Gal. 6. 9.) that is, if ye be not sluggish in the course of well-doing. Take heed therefore of praying the sluggard's prayer, or at the sluggard's rate. "The desire of the slothful kills him, because his hands refuse to labour." Prov. 21. 25. His own desires carry no life in them ; they are even death to his very heart ; cold things that strike death into the soul, and put no life into it.

And then too when faith languisheth, it is faint praying. "Let not that man," (says St. James) that is, the man who wavers like a wave of the sea, and is driven of the wind and tossed; "think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." Jam. 1. 7. What! come to God, as if we did not expect to get any thing by God! and as if we agreed in the same sense with those profane atheists, and symbolized with them who say, "What profit is it that we have prayed to him or kept his ordinances?" go heartlessly into the divine presence; give way to a cold, dull spirit, in the very performance of the duty; and never look after the success of it when it is over. Such had as good never pray at all, who pray only to keep up a custom, and to make a shew; and that they may be able to say when all is over, "The duty is done." Let not such think they shall receive any thing at the hands of God; such especially as come to him with no expectation, and pray to him as to one that cannot save.

It is to cast infamy upon the great Object of our worship; as if we were only blessing an idol, when we pray to the true, living God, as if he were such a one as the idols of the Gentiles are said to be, that have eyes but see not, ears but hear not, and can neither do good nor hurt. It is no wonder if such praying signify nothing; for it carries an affront in itself. Every such prayer is an indignity, and an insolent affront put upon the great God: as if the injunction of this duty upon the children of men, was either unreasonable and to no purpose, and so a reflection upon the wisdom of his law, who has commanded us to pray; (inasmuch as that is always unwisely enjoined that hath no end) or, as if there were no power in him to accomplish what we come to him about, though we come according to his own direction. It cannot, I say, but be an affront to God, either way, to come to him with desponding hearts. In the former case, if our desires languish, we are worse than the importunate widow; in the latter case, if faith languish, we make God worse than the unjust judge.

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