

SERMON XXIX.

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.—ROM. VIII. 22.

THE apostle had showed how the creature waiteth for its future perfect estate; now, what sense it hath of its present condition. In the words we have,—

1. The certainty,—‘We know.’
2. The agony of the creature,—‘It groaneth and travaileth in pain.’
3. Their consort and agreement in this groaning,—‘The whole creation groaneth,’ etc.
4. The duration and continuance,—‘Until now.’

1. The certainty of what is asserted, ‘We know.’ But how do we know? First, We see by our sense, that the whole creation is under vanity and corruption. Secondly, We know by faith that it came by sin; so that partly from sense, and partly by faith, we conclude that the creature is under a burden.

2. The great agony of the creature; it ‘groaneth and travaileth in pain;’ groaneth as a man under an heavy burden; travaileth in pain, as a woman in child-bearing; the creature would fain be disburdened of this estate. Some think that this last metaphor implieth that the issue will be comfortable, for the pain of travail ends in joy: John xvi. 21, ‘A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, for her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man-child is born into the world.’ It may be so here; only I find this metaphor used for bitter pangs and sorrows, without any respect to the end and issue; as Mat. xxiv. 8, ‘All these are the beginning of sorrows.’

3. The consort and harmonious agreement that is between all the parts of the world; *πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις* ‘the whole creation’ collectively, or every creature distributively; they all groan together, and travail in pain together.

4. The duration and continuance, ‘until now;’ that is, from the time that sin entered into the world unto this present time.

Doct. That the whole creation groaneth under the burden of our sins.

First. What is this groaning of the creature; or in what sense the creature is said to groan.

Secondly. How we are concerned in these groans.

Thirdly. How we know it; for who ever heard the groaning of the whole creation?

First. What is this groaning of the creature? Or how can that be ascribed to things without reason, sense, and life? There are two causes of groaning in sensitive creatures,—labour and pain; that which answereth to labour is unwearied motion; that which answereth to pain is corruption and decay.

1. Labour and motion. So we may say the creature is worn out with hard labour to serve the uses of man; because it is in continual motion. The sun moveth from east to west in the day, and in the night from

west to east again: Eccles. i. 5, 'The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place, where he arose;' the Hebrew, *panteth*, as pressing forward to be at his appointed place; to give man light to go about his labour. How many thousands of miles hath it travelled to come to us again, since we went to bed? So Job xxxvii. 11, 'By watering he wearieth the thick cloud, and scattereth the bright clouds; it is turned about by his counsels.' He speaketh of the clouds as things that could be wearied, being hurried hither and thither, to serve the earth in divers places, and spendeth itself in that service. The earth is digged, and rent, and torn with the plough, seldom suffered to enjoy its sabbaths, that it may bring forth fruit to man; the rivers flow, and the sea hath its ebbs and tides; all things in the lower world are full of labour; and so the creature is wearied and worn out to serve even rebel man, to whom God continueth this favour.

2. That which answereth to pain, is their passing away by corruption; the four elements being contrary one to another, are still wasting one another, till all fail; heat against cold, and moisture against dryness; all things being compounded of these four elements do in the end return to them again by dissolution and corruption. And besides, by God's judgment the creature is often blasted in its greatest glory and beauty. Look, as in a fruitful season the valleys are said to laugh with fatness, Ps. lxxv. 12, 13; and the flourishing of the spring is as it were nature's smile; it is a pleasant sight to behold when the earth is blessed of God with increase and variety of fruits; the creatures do as it were rejoice in God's bounty, and invite us to rejoice with them; so on the other side, when these things are taken away, it doth as it were mourn, and look sorrowful-like under the judgment; as they laugh in their kind, so they mourn and groan in their kind: as Jer. xii. 4, 'How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of the field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein?' Isa. xxiv. 4, 'The earth mourneth and fadeth away; the world languisheth and fadeth away;' Isa. xxxiii. 9, 'The earth mourneth and languisheth, Lebanon is ashamed;' Jer. xxiii. 10, 'Because of swearing the land mourneth;' Joel i. 10, 'The field is wasted, the land mourneth, for the corn is wasted, the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth.' In all these places, and many more, the earth is said to mourn when it lieth waste, stripped and despoiled of its wonted verdure and bravery in grass, corn, plants, fruits, wherewith it was once clad and adorned. Now this may come to pass, partly, by external drought, as when the grass was burnt up, that there was no fodder for the beast, 1 Kings xviii. 5. Partly, by storm and tempest, which maketh spoil and havoc of it: Prov. xxviii. 3, 'A sweeping rain leaveth no food.' Partly, by vermin: Joel i. 4, 'That which the palmer-worm hath left, the locust hath eaten; that which the locust hath left, the canker-worm hath eaten; that which the canker-worm hath left, the caterpillar hath eaten.' Sometimes by the irruption and invasion of an enemy: Isa. i. 7, 'Your country is desolate; your cities are burnt with fire; your land, strangers devour it in your presence; and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers.' Sometimes by murrains and pestilential diseases, which hinder all cultivation and tillage: Amos iv. 10, 'I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt; your young men

have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses ; I have made the stink of your camp to come up into your nostrils.' God hath variety of ways to punish man in blasting the creature ; and on all the occasions the land appeareth as in a mourning weed ; and the barren parched ground and withered fruits of the earth are, as it were, the groaning of the creature under man's sin. These things premised, we may see in what sense the creature is said to groan.

[1.] In a way of supposition. If they had any life, sense, or reason, they would groan, or be thus affected ; being wearied with labour, liable to destruction, and perverted from their natural use ; often blasted by God's judgment. If God should open the mouth of the creature, as he did that of Balaam's ass, it would rebuke our madness, groan under their hard servitude : 2 Pet. ii. 16, ' Balaam was rebuked for his iniquity ; the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, rebuked the madness of the prophet.' So if the creature could speak with man's voice, and had man's affections, they would loudly groan in the ears of the Lord of Hosts, and blame us for our disobedience and unthankfulness to God.

[2.] By analogy. There is some proportion and suitableness between our affections, and the inclinations of the creature ; there is something in them which is as it were sense and reason, that is, a shadow and resemblance of it. The grass groweth as if it grew by art, and knew how to grow ; and the corn sprouteth forth as regularly as if it were under direction ; every creature acteth by a rule from which it swerveth not ; a stone in descending, falleth by a straight line as if it had reason to pick it out ; all the art of man cannot draw a straighter line, than that by which a stone falleth down, when it is thrown up into the air. Every creature hath an obediencial instinct to glorify God, as if it obeyed by reason. The creation did, as it were, mourn at the crucifying of Christ ; for nature seemed to be routed into a disorder ; the rocks were rent, the earth quaked, the sun was struck blind with astonishment. There is an intellective assistance, which runneth along with the creature ; that is, the wise and powerful providence of God leadeth them, and governeth them, and directeth them to a better estate ; so that they do in their kind groan under their present burden, till they be delivered from it.

Secondly. How are we concerned in these groans ? Very much.

1. They are upbraiding groans, as they upbraid us of our security and unthankfulness. We that have reason are more senseless than the creatures ; the creature groaneth, and we are stupid, neither affected with our sin or misery : Jer. xii. 14, ' The land mourneth ; yet they say, he shall not see our last end ; ' that is, no evil shall come unto us ; they thought all would be well enough. So, ' For swearing, and lying, and stealing, and adultery, the land mourneth,' Hos. iv. 2, 3 ; but doth the swearer mourn, the adulterer mourn ? ' The vines howl, and the fig tree languisheth,' Isa. xxiv. 7 ; but doth the drunkard mourn, because God is provoked by his filthy excess ? It is very observable that the prophets do often turn from men, and speak to creatures ; as Lam. ii. 18, ' O wall of the daughter of Zion, let thy tears run down as a river day and night ; let not the apple of thine eye cease.' He calls on the wall, either because no men left to mourn, or no men had an heart to mourn, or for both reasons. So Micah vi. 1, 2, ' Hear, ye mountains,

the Lord's controversy, and the strong foundations of the earth, hear the word of the Lord ;' so Jer. xxii. 29, ' O earth, earth !' as if it were in vain to speak to men. Insensible creatures are more fit to be spoken to, than an incredulous, and self-willed, and obdurate people ; they keep still their obediencial subjection to their creator, and do tremble when he threateneth, and groan when he afflicteth ; and therefore the creature is brought in groaning here, as in our stead ; the earth groaneth, which hath not sinned, but only suffereth for sin, to upbraid the hardness of our hearts, because we who are the criminal parties groan not.

2. They are awakening groans. It is spoken hyperbolically to quicken our consideration, and to represent the more emphatically the great misery the creatures are in while they serve sinful man, especially in fulfilling his lusts. Carnal men do not think of these things, and so have no ear to hear these groans ; the creatures speak by our thoughts, and they groan by our affections ; namely, as they excite and stir us up to sigh and long for a better estate than is to be had in this reeling and uncertain world, where sin hath introduced so many changes. Job saith, chap. xii. 7, 8, ' Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee ; the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee ; or speak unto the earth, and it shall teach thee ; and the fishes of the sea, and they shall declare unto thee.' What was the point he had then in hand ? That by the providence of God wicked men may prosper ; not only as these things do most serve the wicked, but the strong keep under the weak, and the great devour the less. But how do the creatures speak, or tell, or declare ? even the mute fishes, that scarce make any sound or noise ? We ask them by our study and meditation, and they answer us by our own thoughts, by the convictions and conclusions we draw from them ; there is a great deal of morality in the bosom of nature, and much wisdom to be learned from the creature, if we would pick it out, and seriously employ our thoughts that way. This is one lesson among the rest ; the creature hath something to say to us concerning the vanity and decay of all things, and a better estate to come ; we hear the creature groaning, as it offereth matter to us to sigh, and groan, and long for a better estate, that we may be at home with God, and free from the miseries of the present world.

3. They are instructive groans ; for they teach us many good lessons.

[1.] They teach us the vanity of the creature, which is now often changed, and must at length be dissolved. To a common eye this world seemeth to be in its highest splendour and beauty, because worldly men judge of things by their carnal affections : Ps. xlix. 11, ' Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations.' They think their heritages and honours shall for ever continue in their name and family, and carry themselves accordingly ; their carnal complacency possesseth them with vain conceits ; and when their posterity are swept away and shifted, new comers that are established in their room are as vain as they. But now, if we bring the word to the creature, and God by his Spirit giveth us an heart to observe these things, we shall see that all is passing and perishing, that the whole world hath a great evil that burdens it, and will at length prove its destruction ; namely, sin ; that the groaning universe doth in effect say to us, ' Arise, depart, this is

not your rest,' Micah ii. 10. It is spoken to the Jews; the land of Canaan was given for a rest at first, but by their sin it had lost much of that use; the frequent changes of estate they met with there for their sins was a summons to remove and look higher. It is true of all the world, it is not our resting-place, since it was defiled by sin; therefore the groaning creature should wean us from the world, and inflame us with a desire of heaven, where is perfect and eternal happiness.

[2.] It teacheth us the evil of sin; it is the burden of the whole creation, of which it would fain be eased. All the vanity that is upon the creature, and all annoyance which we have from the creature, is the fruit of our rebellion against God; which should make us more humble for sin past, and more cautious for the time to come. So much sin as you introduce, so much you disturb the harmony of the creation, and are accessory to the many destructive changes wrought in the world.

[3.] It readeth us a lecture of patience. We live in a groaning world, and must expect to bear our share in the common concert; the world is a valley of tears. Now to seek for joy in a valley of tears, to affect an exemption from groaning, it is to be singular, and be out of tune from the rest of the creation. What is in Ps. lxxxiv. 6, 'the valley of *Bacha*,' the *Septuagint* renders 'the valley of weeping;' it means the scorched weeping ground they passed through; and because their going to Jerusalem to worship was a figure of our progress or journey towards heaven, therefore many apply it to the world, resembled by a valley, as heaven is by a mountain, like Mount Sion; and a valley of tears, because we frequently meet with mourning occasions. Now it should not trouble us to be put upon groaning in a groaning world. We have company with us in our mourning; not only our fellow saints; the apostle urgeth, 1 Pet. v. 9, 'These things are accomplished in your brethren which are in the world.' Every one of God's children have their share of hardships in the world; we think no sorrow like to our sorrow, and that none are so hardly dealt with as we are; others have their sorrows and hardships; the measure and weight of others' sorrows we know by guess, but our own by feeling. All things considered, you will find your lot no harder than the saints of God who went to heaven before you. But here is more company offered; the whole creation groaning for a burden brought upon them, not by their fault but ours; yet submitting to that appointed service till it be the will of God to ease them.

[4.] A lecture of long suffering; which is patience extended. When we are oppressed with many persecutions and afflictions, and these continue long, and we see no end, we despond: 'The creature groaneth and travaileth in pain until now;' that is, from the time sin entered into the world until the whole be dissolved. The continuance of the universe is much longer than the continuance of our lives; therefore let us not repine at so short a time, for the creature hath been in a groaning condition these six thousands years, or thereabout. Surely the softness and delicacy of our flesh is too great, if we must see the end of our troubles as soon as we enter into them. If the creature is obedient to the creator in bearing the burden he lays on it, though it

groan under it, then surely we should submit to his disposing will, so long as he will have us in a suffering condition: Jam. i. 4, 'Let patience have its perfect work.'

[5.] A lecture of repentance and solemn humiliation. If the creature groan under original vanity and corruption, brought upon it by the first sin,—sin being wonderfully increased, the world is ready to sink under the weight of it; therefore when sin increaseth, it is a groaning time; the multitude of the wicked are a burden to the countries where they live. The heathens would call a wicked man, 'the burden of the earth;' the word of God showeth it more plainly; therefore when the wicked increase and walk on every side, and they increase in wickedness, it is time to look about us, and seriously and heartily humble ourselves before God: Lev. xviii. 25, 'And the land is defiled, therefore I do visit the iniquities thereof upon it; and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants;' Micah ii. 10, 'Because it is polluted, it shall destroy you with a sore destruction;' and Jer. ix. 19, 'Our dwellings have cast us out.' The land doth as it were loathe to bear and feed them that so grossly dishonour God.

[6.] A lesson of hope in long sorrow. We should keep up hope and expectation; the creature groaneth till now; yea, but still it expecteth its final deliverance. It is an expression of great rebellion, distrust, and contempt, to say, 'Why should I wait on the Lord any longer?' 2 Kings vi. 33. God can bring the bitterest condition to a most comfortable issue. Consider how he dealeth with other creatures; the creature groaneth and travaileth in pain, but the birth will ensue; the groaning of the creature is like a travailing in birth, and so the calamities of the saints: John xvi. 21, 22, 'A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she is no more in anguish, for joy a man is born into the world; and ye now are in sorrow, but I will see you again, and your hearts shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.' The throes of our sorrow may be very sharp and bitter; but the birth will occasion joy enough to countervail the tediousness of it.

4. They are complaining, accusing groans. The apostle saith, Jam. v. 4, 'Grudge not one against another;' groan not one against another; that is, give not occasion to one another to complain against you to God. It is sad when one christian complaineth against another for his froward, and perverse, and unbrotherly carriage; much more of near relations, husbands and wives, ministers and people. The apostle saith it is not profitable when they give their account with grief and not with joy, Heb. xiii. 17. This groaning of the creature must be interpreted by the standard of this notion: the creature groaneth not with us, but groaneth against us; because of the slavery we put them unto they groan for vengeance and destruction; not in fellow-feeling with thee, but in indignation against thee, if thou be a wicked man. There is a groaning by way of sympathy and compassion, as we are bidden, Rom. xii. 15, to 'rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep;' and there is a groaning by way of accusation and appeal, for revenge against those that have wronged us. We have abused the creature; the groan

of a worm in the ear of the Lord of Hosts will be heard; so James v. 2, 3, 'Your riches are corrupted, your garments are moth-eaten, your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire; you have heaped up treasure together for the last days.' In the day of judgment, the groans of the creature and the circumstances of our sinful actions shall be brought forth as witnesses against us; the moth-eaten garments, the cankered silver shall be produced. So Hab. ii. 11, 'The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it;' that is, the materials of the house built by oppression shall come as witnesses. There is a kind of antipathy between them therein represented. The stones of the wall shall cry, Lord we were built up by rapine and violence; and the beam shall answer, True, Lord, even so it is. The stones shall cry, Vengeance, Lord, upon our ungodly ones; and the beam shall answer, Woe to him, because he built his house with blood! Conscience is a terrible remembrancer; the very creatures which sinners abused will be brought in testimony against them to their conviction and condemnation. You will say, What is this to the restoration of the universe, or those elementary bodies in this lower world, to which you seem to confine this restoration? These creatures shall be consumed in the last fire; how then brought into the judgment?

Answer,

(1.) The elementary bodies do concur to the increase and preservation of these things. Lands gotten by violence are made fruitful by sun, air, and rain; the sun now shineth upon these wicked men, and the rain falleth upon their fields; the creatures abused to excess come from both the sunshine and the earth's fertility, which is the mother of all wealth.

(2.) Though many of these creatures shall be consumed in this last fire, yet they shall have an *esse cognitum*, in the memory and conscience of the sinner, though not an *esse rei*, an actual existence. And thus the wine abused to drunkenness may witness against the drunkard; the sacrilegious morsels which the glutton alienated from the poor, and devoted to lust and appetite, shall witness against the glutton. *Memoria præteritorum* is one of the punishments in hell: Luke xvi. 25, 'Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things.' The very clothing by which they did manifest their pride, shall witness against the proud; the lands, goods, and houses of worldlings, Isa. v. 8, shall witness against the worldling; the gold and silver which they preferred before everlasting riches, shall witness against the carnal; the place, the room, the bed wherein men committed filthiness and lewdness, shall witness against the unclean; when conscience shall be forced to the review, all these things shall come into his mind. To this also may be referred that passage; Josh. xxiv. 27, 'And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold this stone shall be a witness unto us, for it hath heard all the words of the Lord, which he spake unto us; it shall be there for a witness to you, lest you deny your God.' How could the stone which he had placed under a great oak, which was very near the sanctuary of the Lord, hear or give witness? Partly by God's appeal, and partly by their memory and conscience. It was a monument to put them in

mind of this solemn covenant; and so might serve to convince them of their sin. Thus hearing is ascribed to a senseless stone, because it was a circumstance that might be produced in the judgment.

Thirdly, How we know it? For who ever heard the groaning of the whole creation?

1. By sensible experience we know the vanity of the creature. Ocular demonstration is enough to tell us all that things are frail and perishing: Ps. cxix. 96, 'I have seen an end of all perfection.'

2. The word affirmeth, First, That this came in by man's sin; and the common apprehension of mankind attesteth it, that wicked men are unprofitable burdens of the earth, and bring a judgment on the place where they live. Secondly, That God having repaired the world by Christ, there is a better estate appointed for man; and so by consequence for the creatures, which are an appendage to him: Isa. xi. 6, 7, 8, 9. The enmity of the creature shall cease there, as in Noah's ark.

3. The Spirit improveth it, both the vanity of the creature, and our mortality, and the hopes of restoration. God must teach us the plainest lessons: Ps. xc. 12, 'Lord, teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.' Deut. xxix. 2, 3, 4, 'Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; the great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs and the great miracles, yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.' And the hopes of restoration: faith is his mere gift and production: Eph. ii. 8, 'For by grace ye are saved, through faith; and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.'

From the whole take these corollaries:

1. That sinful man is an enemy to all the creatures, as well as to himself. He hath brought misery upon himself, and all the world which was his place to dwell in. The creation was a well-tuned instrument, upon which man might make music to the praise and honour of God; but the strings of the harp are broken; and there is nothing but jarring instead of harmony, and groans for praise. Yea, man himself, who is the mouth of the creation, is very dumb and tongue-tied in the praises of God.

2. That every particular land fareth the worse for wicked men. Man hath brought a burden on the creation, and the increase of wicked men showeth the ruin of any people or country: Prov. xi. 10, 11, 'When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth; and when the wicked perish, there is shouting. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.' The meaning of these two proverbs is, that the godly bring on a blessing on the land where they live, and the wicked a curse. The godly bring on a blessing by their prayers and holy example, God's providence, and respect thereunto; but the wicked a curse by their abuse of the creatures. The corrupt world think otherwise, that all their dishonour, their judgments, come from suffering the godly to live amongst them. 'It is not for the king's profit to suffer them to live,' Esth. iii. 8.

3. That we must not ascribe the alterations and changes of the creature to chance or fortune, but to God's providence punishing man's sin. Some

do not see the hand of God ; as ignorant, stupid, and careless persons : Ps. xxviii. 5, 'They regard not the work of the Lord, nor the operation of his hand.' And some care not to see : Isa. xxvi. 11, 'When thy hand is lifted up, they will not see ;' they put all judgments upon the ordinary course of second causes ; either a chance, 1 Sam. xiv. 9 ; or attribute it to some natural thing : John xii. 29, they said it thundered, when God spake from heaven to own Christ. Some see, but are in part blinded with malice and prejudice ; which is to be seen by their making perverse interpretations of providence : 2 Sam. xvi. 8, 'The Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul.'

4. You see a reason why a righteous man should be merciful to his beast : Prov. xii. 10, 'A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast ; but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.' There is burden enough already upon the creature, under which he groaneth ; he would bring on no more than needeth ; he will not use them unmercifully, nor wear them out with too great and continual labours ; but giveth them that food, rest, and refection which is necessary. In the destruction of Nineveh God had respect to the beasts : Jonah iv. 11, 'There was much cattle in that city.'

5. The wonderful dulness and dead-heartedness of man in case of sin and misery ; so that the creatures are fain to supply our room. Few are sensible of this burden ; we should all groan, but do not. Surely we ought to be excited to groan for sin and misery, and long for the happiness of the saints ; so ver. 23, 'And not only they, but we ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies.'

6. The great need there is to draw off our hearts from the inordinate love of the creature, and to lay up treasure in heaven. What can we expect from a groaning creature, which will soon come to an end, but that only we wholly trust sense, and judge according to present appearance ? Otherwise we would say with the apostle, We know and look further than the compass of this world, to that place where all is firm and stable ; but we seldom improve these thoughts.

7. How unsuitable sensual rejoicing is unto the state which we are now in. It is a groaning world, and here we seek all our pleasures and contentments. It is a charge against sensualists, Jam. v. 5, 'Ye have lived in pleasure upon earth,' the place of our exile, the place defiled with man's sin, the place subjected to a curse for man's sake. Moderate contentment is allowed us during our pilgrimage, as appears both by the dispensation of God's providence and covenant ; but our full joy is reserved for hereafter ; his providence alloweth many natural comforts ; and his covenant many perpetual blessings.