

SERMON XXXIII.

But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.—ROM. viii. 25.

IN this verse the former doctrine is improved to the main end of this discourse, which is to persuade to a patient waiting for glory to come, in the midst of the sufferings and troubles of this life. The apostle goeth to work by way of supposition and inference.

First, The supposition,—‘If we hope for that we see not.’

Secondly, The inference thence deduced,—‘Then do we with patience wait for it.’

From the first, observe that hope is conversant about what we see not. Hope may be taken for a natural affection, or for a spiritual grace; the one will help to explain the other.

1. The object of hope as it is a natural affection. It is a good, future, possible, and hard to be obtained. [1.] A *good* it must be, for hope is one of the affections of prosecution, not aversion; man hath an irascible and concupiscible faculty, called by the apostle passions and lusts; a desiring or eschewing faculty; the one is conversant about good, the other about evil; for evil is not hoped for, but feared; herein the affections and the grace agree; they both aim at good, but the object of the christian hope is *summum bonum*, the best and chiefest good, which is the vision and fruition of God, in comparison of which all the good things of the earth are but trifles, and poor, inconsiderable vanities. [2.] A *good future*; for when anything is possessed, it ceaseth to be hoped for; when the thing desired is seen and enjoyed, hope hath no more to do; herein also the two hopes agree; the object of christian hope is something future, not yet received or enjoyed. In this lower world our God is unseen, our blessedness is yet to come, and lieth in another world, which we cannot come at till we shoot the gulf of death; therefore the christian hope needeth to be more strong and fixed. [3.] It is *possible*; for the serious and regular desires of nature can never be carried to that which is impossible. A man may wish for mountains of gold, and please his fancy with chimeras of strange things; but his reason and will is only affected with things feasible, and such as probably may be obtained, and lie within his grasp and reach; the industrious hope is only of things possible. [4.] It is not only possible, but *difficult*, not to be procured without some industry and labour; for things easy to be compassed are as if they were already enjoyed. These two last qualifications of the object of hope show that it is a middle thing between despair and presumption; despair only looketh at the difficulty, and leaveth out the possibility, and so taketh off all endeavours; as Paul’s companions (Acts xxvii. 20, ‘When all hope they should be saved was taken away’) ceased striving, and let the ship go whither it would. Men will not labour for that which they despair to obtain; it holdeth good in spirituals; when men despair of mending their condition, they give over all care about it; as those wretches, Jer. xviii. 12, ‘And they said, There is no hope, but

we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart.' We have a saying, 'Past cure, past care.' On the other side, presumption never considereth the difficulty, but only pleaseth itself with a loose and slight reflection upon the possibility; and therefore do unreasonably imagine to obtain their end without setting themselves to use the means, or bestowing that cost and pains by which all worldly good is obtained. Now presumption is most incident to young men, who are not acquainted with the world, and promise themselves great things without considering what may be said to the contrary, or what is needful to obtain them; difficulty there is in every business; if only considered, it breedeth despair; if overlooked, it breedeth presumption; but hope between both apprehendeth such difficulty as calleth for diligence, and such possibility as every cross accident may not make us give over the attempt. It holdeth good in religion; the difficulties must be sufficiently understood, for Christ will have us sit down and count the charges; and yet not so regarded as to discourage us in our duty; we must stand all hardships as good soldiers of Jesus Christ; and press towards the mark of our high calling in Jesus Christ, whatever it costs us.

2. As it is a spiritual grace. There the object of hope is some good, future and unseen. But other qualifications are necessary beyond these already mentioned.

[1.] It must be something promised by God. [2.] Believed by us, before we can hope for it.

[1.] Such future things as God hath promised to bestow upon us. These are the matter and object of our faith and hope; the promise giveth us notice, and the promise giveth us assurance. (1.) Notice. We can have no other certain knowledge of their futurity but by God's promise. The light of nature or reason giveth a shrewd guess at a future estate, but the certain knowledge we have by God's word; there life and immortality is brought to light: 2 Tim. i. 10, 'He brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.' There we have the clear prospect of it. The heathen had nothing but the light of nature to guide them, spake doubtfully of a future estate; like men travelling on the hills, and see the spire of a steeple at a distance, sometimes they have a sight of it, and presently they lose it, and so cannot certainly tell whether they saw it, yea or no; but all is clear, full, and open in God's promise. (2.) Certainty and assurance; for it conveyeth a right to us upon certain terms; for he that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life, John iii. 36; hath it in the offer and promise of God, if he will fulfil the condition required; not only shall have it at the close of their days, but they have the grant already, and therefore wait for the fruition. As we are fulfilling the conditions, we gain more security and confidence that we shall have it: 1 Tim. vi. 12, 'Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life;' ver. 19, 'Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation, that they may lay hold on eternal life;' the meaning is, challenge it for theirs. In short, our expectation must be grounded on some promise, or else it is but a fancy and presumption.

[2.] The thing hoped for must be believed by us, for there can be no expectation of things not seen till there be faith, which is 'the

evidence of things not seen,' Heb. xi. 1. First, there is a firm assent by faith; we are as confident in some measure of those things, as if we saw them with our eyes, or as we are of those things which we daily see. Then after this assent there followeth earnest expectation; for hope maketh the assent practical. Though God promise never so much, yet if we believe him not, we expect nothing; therefore faith is necessary. Look as to bodily sight, there needeth an object to be seen, and an eye by which we see; so in spiritual sight, the promise sets the object before us: Heb. xii. 2, 'Looking unto Jesus;' and Heb. vi. 18, 'Lay hold of the hope set before us.' But the eye is faith, which, though it cannot give us sight, it giveth us foresight; we have heard of it, though yet we have not seen it, and see it by the eyes of the mind as it is contained in the promise of the everlasting God, though we do not, and cannot see it with the eyes of the body. Compare it with reason. By reason we apprehend more than we see, for we see effects in their causes, but that is but probable foresight, for many things intervene between the cause and the effect. By faith we foresee the blessing in the promise; by reason we see things beyond sense, so far as natural probabilities will carry us; by faith we see things beyond reason, so far as the promises of good invite us to a better hope.

But how can we surely hope for that we see not,—which neither sense nor reason can inform us of?

Answer 1. This glory is not a fancy; it is seen by many in our nature that now possess it, and by the word of God you are invited to follow them in the same course of holiness and godliness, that you may in time see it also: Heb. vi. 12, 'Be ye followers of them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises;' propound the same noble end and the same holy course, and matters of faith will in time become matters of sense. Now, though the end be unknown, the way is so good and holy and justifiable by reason, that we should venture the imitation of them, not their holiness only, but their faith, Heb. xi. 13; they lived and died in this faith; their life was holy, and their death was happy, that are gone into the other world. But you will say, If we could talk with any of these that are gone into the other world: Luke xvi. 30, 31, 'And he said, Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they would repent: and he said unto him, They have Moses and the prophets, and if they will not hear them, neither will they be persuaded if one should come from the dead.' They are out of the sphere of our commerce; their testimony is not convenient for the government of God, who will not govern the world by sense, but by faith; and besides, you have better hopes, Moses and the prophets; there is more reason to persuade a man the scriptures are true, than to believe a message brought him from one among the dead.

2. One that hath seen, and is an infallible witness, hath testified to us of the truth of these things we hope for: John i. 18, 'No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.' Christ perfectly saw and knew all that he hath told us of God and the world to come: John iii. 11, 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that which we

know, and testify that we have seen, and ye receive not our witness ;' so that our faith and hope goeth on sure grounds ; so ver. 32, ' What he hath seen and heard he testifieth, and no man receiveth his testimony.' A good man, whose testimony is valuable, that hath been in a strange country, and testifieth what he hath seen there of it, would not we believe him ? Christ, that came from the other world, and told us of the blessedness of it, deserveth the credit of a good man ; he used a faithful plainness : John xiv. 2, ' If it were not so, I would have told you.' But more of a teacher sent from God, who confirmed his message by miracles, and laid down a doctrine holy and good ; and shall not we receive his testimony concerning these things he had perfect knowledge of, assured us of the truth of them ? shall we not receive his testimony ?

3. Those that saw him and conversed with him were not only authorised by him to show us the way to eternal life, but saw so much of it themselves as the mortal state is capable of, yet enough to prove the reality of the thing : 1 John i. 1-3, ' That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and manifested unto us) ; that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you ;' Acts iv. 20, ' For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard ;' they had it not by hearsay, but some kind of sight. There being fidelity in the witnesses, there should be faith in those that hear and read. The apostles had sensible confirmation of what they did declare. If they say that they heard, saw, and handled that which they never did, then they were deceivers ; if they only imagined they did see and hear those things, then they were deceived ; if what they saw and heard will not amount to a proof of eternal life, then their testimony is not sufficient. But their downright simple honesty and great holiness showeth that they had no mind to deceive, and the nature of the things they relate showeth that they could not be deceived ; for they were eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses, and always conversing with Christ : the proof is sufficient. If such miracles, such resurrection, ascension, such a voice from the excellent glory, will not prove another world, what will ?

4. There is care taken that we also may have a sight of these things so far as is necessary to a lively and quickening hope ; for the Spirit is given to refine our reason and elevate our minds, and raise them above sensible things, that we may believe these supernatural truths, and hope to enjoy this blessedness in the way of christianity : Gal. v. 5, ' For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.' Interpret it not only of the righteousness of faith, but the hope built thereupon ; it doth assure us of bliss and glory for all that are obedient to the faith, and believe those endless joys which are prepared for christians, John i. 17, 18.

5. If we see not these things by faith, it is because we are blinded by lusts and brutish affections, which misbecome the human nature : 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4, ' If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, whose eyes the God of this world hath blinded.' It is because worldly

advantages have seduced and perverted their affections, which enchain their minds, that these sublime truths make no impression upon them, nor have any influence upon their hearts; so 2 Peter i. 9, 'He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off.' They have not that purity of heart which should enable them to believe this doctrine, or see things that should contradict or check their lusts; and being wedded to present things, have no prospect of things to come.

Use 1. For confutation of those that will not believe or hope for anything which they see not. They think christians a company of credulous fools; that nothing is sure that is invisible; that the promises of the gospel are but like a dream of mountains of gold, or pearls dropt from the sky; and all the comforts thence deduced are but fanatical illusions; that nothing so ridiculous as to depend upon unseen hopes that lie in another world; they make the life of faith a matter of sport and jesting: Ps. xxii. 7, 8, 'All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip and shake the head, saying, He trusted in God that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him;' 1 Tim. iv. 10, 'We therefore labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God.' Christians thought their reward sure, and endured all things; atheists and infidels therefore scoff at them, persecute them. To these I shall propose two things.

1. Is nothing to be believed and hoped for that is not seen? Reason will show you the contrary. Country people obey a king whom they never saw, but only know his power by the effects in his laws and officers of justice; and doth not sense teach us the same concerning God? If we transgress his laws by omitting a duty or committing a sin, we hear from him though we see him not: Rom. i. 18, 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;' and Heb. ii. 2, 'For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.' And for hope; do not men venture their estates in foreign countries in the hands of persons whom they never saw nor knew? And shall we venture nothing on the promises of God? It is true, God liveth in another world, and our hopes lie there also; but doth he not manifest himself from thence, to be concerned in our actions, whether they be good or evil? And if he be concerned in them, will he not punish the evil and reward the good? Hath not natural conscience a sense of these things? And therefore it is unreasonable to question these things.

2. They think good people are credulous and easy of belief; their own experience of these good people evidenceth the contrary, that they are too slow of heart to believe what God hath revealed concerning the other world, and that by the use of all holy means it is with difficulty accomplished. But what if we prove that none so credulous as the atheist or infidel?

[1.] You are not sure there is no such life; it is impossible they should ever know or prove the contrary; it may be, questionless, the Lord that made this world can make a world to come, and the same persons to exist there in ignominy, contempt, and shame, that lived wicked here, and bestow honour on the godly and holy. The ques-

tion between the downright infidel and the christian is not so much whether there be a world to come, but whether we can prove there is none. The belief of the positive,—that there is a God, that there is everlasting life, is necessary to our hope; but to their conviction let them infallibly prove there is none; they can never do that; you cannot disprove the reality of the christian hope, or by any sound argument evince that there is no heaven or hell. For aught you can say or know, there are both; and if we should go on no further, it were best to take the surer side; especially when you part with no more than a few base pleasures and carnal satisfactions that are not worth the keeping. In a lottery, where there is but a loose possibility of gaining, men will venture a shilling, or a small matter, for a prize of a hundred pounds; so, be there no heaven or hell, or be there one, you part with no more than the vain pleasures of a fading life; but if it should prove true, in what a woeful case are you then, when, to gratify a brutish mind, you run so great an hazard? The heathens granted it an hypothesis conducing to virtue and goodness.

[2.] To the atheist and infidel, bating all scripture, it may be proved that it is a thousand to one but it is so. Natural reason will persuade us of the immortality of the soul, and the fears of guilty conscience are shrewd presages of eternal punishment; the tradition and consent of barbarous nations, as well as the civilised, doth attest it, desires of happiness are so natural. So that these *bravadoes*, that would outface the religion they are bred in, showeth; none so credulous as they that will hearken to every fond suggestion of their own carnal hearts or atheistical companions, and prefer the brutish conceits of their own frothy wit before the common reason of mankind, or that rational evidence wherewith the doctrine of eternal life is accompanied.

Use 2. Is to reprove the sensual part of mankind, who are altogether for the present world: 2 Tim. iv. 10, 'Demas hath forsaken us, and embraced the present world.' They must have present delights, present fruition; a little thing in hand is more than the promises of those great things which are to come. The worldling's comfort wholly lieth in those things that are seen; they live by sense, as the christian liveth by faith; they must have something in the view of sense, or have nothing to live upon—lands, honours, pleasures; when these are out of sight, they are in darkness; but a christian looketh to things future and unseen, secured to him by the promise of God.

Use 2. is to exhort us to seek after the happiness we never saw. We shall see it in time, but now we hope for it; and it is no vain and uncertain hope; the things we hope for are sure and near. [1.] They are sure. God's truth is as certain as truth itself can be, and believers so account it in the holy word: Job xix. 25, 26, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another, though my reins be consumed within me;' 2 Cor. v. 1, 'For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.' To a believer it should not be a conjecture, but a point of faith and certainty. [2.] It is near. Things at

a distance move us not, though they be never so great; it will not be long ere our great change come about, and therefore we should have more effectual thoughts about the world wherein we shall shortly live, and make what preparations are necessary thereunto; as 2 Tim. iv. 6, 'The time of my departure is at hand;' therefore we should watch, and be always ready; we must be gone hence ere long; therefore do not set objects of faith at a greater distance than God hath set them, lest your time be stolen from you, and you step into the other world before you thought of it, or prepared for it.

Use 3. Do we hope for that which we see not? [1.] It may be known by the victory and overruling influence of these hopes, if they govern the design and business of our lives. If they do, then these things will take up more of our time and hearts and care than things sensible and visible: 2 Cor. iv. 18, 'While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' If your hope be not powerful and effectual to overcome your inclinations to things seen, and break the force of them, it is but a slight hope. [2.] If we hope for things unseen, they will be the life and joy and solace of our actions. Some have no other joys and sorrows than what are fetched from fleshly and sensible things, and speak of nothing so comfortably and so seriously as of this worldly life; the pleasures of the flesh revive them, but they take little comfort in the joys of the other world. But where the eye of the soul is opened to behold the glory of the world to come, it lets in an abundance of heavenly pleasure: Rom. v. 2, 'And rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.' [3.] More eager desires and diligent seeking after this blessedness. For hope is an industrious affection: Col. iii. 1, 'If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above;' Mat. vi. 33, 'First seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness.' His great business is to get what he hopeth for; his endeavours are serious and constant, and the course of his life is for heaven.

Secondly, The inference thence deduced, 'Then do we with patience wait for it.'

Doct. They only hope for eternal life who continue in the pursuit of it with patience. As hope is bred by faith, so is patience bred by hope. It is sometimes made the fruit of faith, or a steadfast reliance on God's promises; as Heb. vi. 12, 'But followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises;' sometimes of hope: Rom. xii. 12, 'Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation.' The great work of hope is to provide us patience to endure the hardships which at present lie upon us.

1. Let me speak of the kinds of patience. There is a threefold sort of patience.

[1.] The bearing patience, which is a constancy in adversity, and worketh constancy and perseverance, notwithstanding the difficulties and trials that we meet with in our passage to heaven: Heb. x. 36, 'Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye may receive the promise.' A child of God cannot be without patience, because he cannot be without troubles and molestations in the flesh; a man would think that he that hath done the will of God, and been careful in all things to keep a good conscience, should have nothing else to do but go

and take possession of his blessed hopes ; but it is not enough to do good, but before we can go to heaven we must suffer evil ; God hath something to do by us, and something to do with us. Now we must be prepared to do all things rather than fail of our duty, nor desert a good way because it is difficult to follow it ; but suffer the greatest evils, and suffer long and constantly, even to death, and that readily and willingly. And this is patience.

[2.] There is the waiting patience, to tarry God's leisure. Evil is present, and good is absent, and to come ; a trouble may arise from the absence of the good we hope for, and the long delay of it, as well as from the evil that we endure ; in the meantime, therefore, the scriptures recommend to us 'the patience of hope,' 1 Thes. i. 3, or waiting the good pleasure of God, till our final deliverance be accomplished : Lam. iii. 36, 'It is good to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God.' Time is certainly determined in God's purpose, and it will not be long ere it come about ; and it is not only decreed and determined, but promised. We must undergo death before we can have life ; and we are not lords of our own lives, but guardians to keep them for God, and he will in time deliver the soul into a state of light, life, and glory. This waiting patience is delivered to us under the similitude of an husbandman, James v. 7, who 'waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, till he receive the early and latter rain.' The husbandman cannot look for a present harvest ; but the seed that is cast into the ground must endure all weathers before it can spring up into a blade and ear ; so must we expect our season.

[3.] The working patience, which is going on with our self-denying obedience, how tedious soever it be to the flesh. Thus we are told that the good ground 'bringeth forth fruit with patience,' Luke viii. 15. The others are hasty, must have present satisfaction, or else grow weary of religion. All evils come from impatency ; they could not tarry till God gave crowns and pleasures, therefore they miscarried by their inclinations to vain delight. So the heirs of promise are described to be those that continue with patience in well doing, Rom ii. 7. And to the church of Ephesus, God saith, Rev. ii. 2, 'I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience.' The business of religion is carried on with great diligence and painfulness ; it is not an idle and sluggish profession ; lusts are not easily mortified, neither do graces produce their perfect work with a little perfunctory care ; no, but much labour is required. Now, to abound in the work of the Lord requireth a fervent hope to sweeten it.

2. The qualification of that hope which produceth this patience : it is well grounded, and it is lively. [1.] It is a serious and well grounded hope. When we first gave up ourselves to Christ, we reckoned and allowed for labours and troubles ; the Lord telleth us aforehand, Mat. vii. 14, 'Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.' The entrance and the progress is displeasing to the flesh, or the carnal nature in us ; so Mat. xvi. 24, 'Then said Jesus unto his disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and follow me ;' and Luke xiv ; if we will make war with the old serpent, build for heaven. Your hope is groundless if you hope for eternal life and are unwilling to undertake any difficulty for Christ's sake ; you must reckon upon displeasing the flesh, offending the world,

if you would enter into life. [2.] It is lively; it is not the cold and superficial, but the earnest and effectual hope. The desires of a lively hope are vehement; we long for enjoyment, and would fain attain the end; but they are also submissive, and we will quietly wait God's leisure; as Paul had a desire to depart, yet was willing to abide in the flesh if he might do God any service, Phil. i. 23, 24. Though the way be long, the difficulties great and many, yet we must be content to be without our reward till our work is finished, and without our crown till our warfare is ended, and suffer evil things, and not forsake good things, which are the way also to obtain better; as long as God will prolong life, though it be to endure more troubles, we must submit.

3. How this hope produceth patience; with respect to the object, and the subject—

[1.] With respect to the object. This patience ariseth from the certainty and goodness of the things hoped for; it is a sure and great reward. First, The certainty; it is not a vain hope, such as is built upon the promise of a deceitful man, but the word of the ever-living God: Job xiii. 15, 'Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him.' The holy obstinacy of hope cometh from the certainty of the promise. Secondly, The greatness of the things promised. They are rare and excellent, worth the waiting for. It promiseth rest for labour, Rev. xiv. 13; your troublesome work will not last long, but be over in a little time, and you shall have joy and delight for pain and sorrow and all the sad things of the present life: 1 Peter iv. 13, 'But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad with exceeding joy.' And glory for shame: Heb. xii. 2, 'Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.'

[2.] The subject. First, It breedeth courage and fortitude, and strengtheneth our resolutions for God and heaven; the spirit of power is hope, 2 Tim. i. 7. Secondly, It breedeth joy and comfort. All the pleasures of the world doth not give that quiet content and rest to the soul, which the hope of glory doth to a believer: Mat. v. 12, 'Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.'

Use 1. To persuade us to this patience of hope. The things hoped for are to come, at a great distance; many things must be done, many things suffered, and we must make our way through the midst of dreadful enemies, if we would attain our end. It is with us as with David, he was promised a kingdom, and at length he had it, but in the meantime liable to many troubles. Remember, David had his troubles; so it is with you, many are the troubles of the righteous, but you must do nothing unworthy of our great hopes; we expect great things, therefore we should contemn low things and endure hard things; all the pleasures of the world are mean and low, and the hardships carry no comparison or proportion with our hopes. What great evils will men endure to obtain worldly gain, rise early—go to bed late, eat the bread of sorrows, run from one end of the world to the other! Our hope is not sound unless it breedeth this patient waiting. If we have a true hope, we not only *ought* in point of duty, but *shall*; it is the property of hope so to do, to submit with patience to all things which God sendeth in the meantime, and comfort ourselves with the glory that shall ensue.