

## A SERMON PREACHED BEFORE THE PARLIAMENT.

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*And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, nor day, nor night, &c.—ZECH. xiv. 6, 7.*

THESE words are a notable prophecy, and, as all prophecies are, somewhat obscure. Your time and occasions will not give leave to search them to the bottom. That we may state the meaning and particular application to the time concerned upon sure evidence, whether they relate to the general state of the times under the gospel dispensation, I say to that whole tract of time from Christ's ascension to his second coming; or rather, some special season when this shall be most eminently fulfilled; and what that season is I shall not now dispute. Let it suffice to note that you have here—(1.) A description of troublous times; (2.) A prescription of comforts against the troubles of them.

1. The description of troublous times, ver. 6—*And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark.*

2. A prescription of comforts; and there three things are observable—

[1.] The short continuance of them—*It shall be one day*; that is, one period of providence.

[2.] The providential ordination and disposal of them—*Known unto the Lord.*

[3.] The end and issue of them—*At evening it shall be light.* There are two things intimated—the issue shall be comfortable, and that in a strange season—*At evening.*

To explain these parts—

First, The state of the times. By light and darkness, day and night, is meant prosperity and adversity, Isa. xxi. 11, 12; truth and falsehood, joy and sorrow, hopes and fears. Now, when it is said they shall be neither light nor dark, the meaning is, neither good nor bad to any extremity, neither applaud nor complain, neither thorough day nor thorough night, but an intermixture and vicissitude of either.

Secondly, The comforts produced.

1. 'It shall be one day;' one period or course of providence, much after the same tenor. God's people may meet with sharp en-

counters here in the world, and be kept in much uncertainty as to their outward comforts ; but the time is but short ; short in itself, short in comparison of eternity, short in regard of their own desert, short with respect to the enemies' rage, short with respect to our love to God, Gen. xxix. 20, and many other considerations, &c.

2. 'Known to the Lord ;' that is, determined, appointed by him. We know it not many times : Acts i. 7, 'It is not for you to know the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power ;' but it is known to him. Nothing befalleth us without his providence and special designation, his hand and counsel : Acts iv. 28, 'To do whatsoever thy hand and counsel determined before to be done.' God taketh notice of these affairs. He hath set the time, and tempered with his own hand every ounce and drachm of that bitter cup we drink of.

3. The issue and close—'Towards morning it shall be light ;' where the issue is comfortable and the season strange. It shall end well, and that at such a time when nobody would look for it. All providences to God's church end in light, and this at the evening, when sun and day is gone, when seemingly all things tend to a new calamity, and are ready to introduce a sad night and extreme darkness. When miseries first seize upon us we are full of hopes ; and when things begin to clear up and look hopefully, we say, Now it will end, and, Then it will end, when it may be it is but the beginning of the day or morning of our troubles. But at evening, when our hopes are quite spent, and we give all for lost, then unexpected deliverance breaketh in, and we come to a period of all our troubles : Luke xviii. 8, 'I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.'

*First*, From description, observe, that the day of the church's conflict is mixed, and yieldeth wonderful variety of providences. Sometimes truth and righteousness, with its fautors and abettors, getteth the upper hand ; and sometimes the contrary party, that foment error and unrighteousness. Now, it is a doubtful day in a twofold regard—(1.) Because light and darkness are either intermixed or alternate ; either because they shine together at the same time, or they do by turns succeed each other ; either because crosses and comforts, troubles or successes, are equally poised, and a man cannot say which is greater, the light or darkness ; (2.) Or else because our estate in respect of either is not durable and fixed, but liable to great uncertainties ; we do not know which will carry it at the last. Let me illustrate the point in either sense.

1. There is an intermixture of providences at the same time, and the church is in several respects both happy and miserable at once. Here things go well, and there ill ; as, for instance, it may be ill with many private men when it may be well with the public ; as Paul in prison rejoiced when the gospel was freely preached, Phil. i. 15—*Modo me moriente, floreat ecclesia*. Or it may be well with us when it is ill with the church ; as Nehemiah was preferred when the city of God and the sepulchres of their fathers lay waste, Neh. i. It is a rare case when there is a perfect harmony between our private condition and public happiness, Ps. cxxviii. 6. But to come to instances more home and express to the present case. Jacob was at once frightened with hearing of Esau's four hundred men, and cheered with the sight

of an host of angels sent to guard him. The angel that wrestled with him blessed him but maimed him. Paul had his revelations and his thorn in the flesh at the same time. And to be yet more express in public cases, here success, there a loss; here it is Goshen for light; there Egypt for darkness; here hopes, there fears: as Rev. x. 1, 'I saw a mighty angel, that was clothed with a cloud, and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire.' Christ appeared thus to his church and people. A cloud, that signified a storm, and a rainbow, *Nuncius fœderis et serenitatis*, that signifieth a calm, or fair weather; this at the same time. These are strange prelusions of providence. God tempereth his dispensations; good and evil are interwoven with one another in a strange variety. Some evil there is to show we are not past all danger; some good, to show we are not shut out from all hope; as a wise pilot taketh in so much burden as will ballast the ship, and not sink it.

2. Successively there is a vicissitude and interchange of conditions; good and evil succeed each other by turns; as see the state of the Jewish church. Saul's time was bad, David and Solomon's good; Rehoboam and Abijah's bad, Asa and Jehoshaphat good; Joram and Joash bad, Uzziah and Jotham good; Ahaz bad, Hezekiah good; Manasseh and Ammon bad again. Josiah good, and his successors till the captivity all bad; after the captivity good, a little reviving. Thus variously doth God exercise his people in the world. Or take a more particular case; Hezekiah, after his coming to the crown, prospered for divers years; but the tide soon turneth; Sennacherib invadeth his country, seizeth on all; but when he prayeth, God delivereth him by a miracle, smiting Sennacherib's host, 2 Kings xx. 1. Then he sickens, and is ready to die, yet he dieth not, but fifteen years are added to his life. After this, his heart was lifted up, 2 Chron. xxxii. 25; then wrath cometh upon him, a sad message concerning the calamities of his posterity. What a strange succession is here! up and down, day and night, light and dark. So Dan. xi. 32-34. The church is in danger of being ruined; 'Then the understanding among them shall do exploits;' and yet after that, 'they shall fall by the sword,' and by 'the flame,' and by 'spoil many days;' and then holpen by a little help, and so get up again after their hopeless condition. Human affairs, under God, depend much on the people's hearts, and how uncertain are they! Those that cried Hosanna to-day, to-morrow Crucify. Peter makes a glorious confession, and a little after a gross denial Paul was received as an angel of God, and then looked upon as an enemy, Gal. iv. 14-16. The church complaineth, Ps. cii. 10, 'Thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.' Now in prosperity; then that being abused brings adversity. Compare 2 Sam. xix. 43, with 2 Sam. xxii. 1. In the first place we find them striving with the men of Judah, saying, 'We have ten parts in David;' and chap. xx. 1, 'We have no part in David; every one to his tents, O Israel.'

*Secondly*, The reason of this, why the day of our conflict is such a mixed doubtful day. Let us consider—(1.) The equity; (2.) The wisdom of God in it.

1. The equity of it. It is such a day as is very suitable to our condition in the world.

[1.] We are in a middle place, between heaven and hell, and therefore partake somewhat of both. Hell is set forth by utter darkness; and of heaven it is said, 'There is no night there,' Rev. xxi. 25. It is all day or all night in the other world; but here, neither day nor night, neither clear nor dark. It is convenient that this middle place of trial should have somewhat of both. In hell, all evil and only evil, Ezek. xvii., without any temperament of mercy; and in heaven, no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor any pain any more, Rev. xxi. 4. These pleased spirits are ever rejoicing. God would give a taste of the other world in the present life; of eternal death and eternal life in the sorrows and comforts of the present life; it shall not be too well nor too ill in the world.

[2.] We have mixed principles—flesh and spirit, Gal. v. 17; and as long as sin remaineth in us we cannot be perfectly happy. The flesh needeth to be weakened by divers afflictions; as grace to be encouraged, and love cherished, with experiences and proofs of God's favour; clouds and sunshine, frowns and favours, summer and winter, day and night. I speak of the best. Alas! generally we are 'evil, only evil, and that continually,' Gen. vi. 5; and therefore our condition might be so.

[3.] As our principles are mixed, so are all our operations. There is a mixture of good and evil in all our services. The water receiveth a tincture from the channel through which it passeth. Our duties are spotted and stained; there is iniquity in holy things; yea, our zealous undertakings and engagements for Christ have a tang of the flesh. There is a great deal of wrath, revenge, fleshly zeal, and kitchen-fire, rather than a coal of the altar, while we are engaged for God: Isa. lxiv. 6, 'Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; we are as a dried leaf; our iniquities have taken us away.' None of our actions are free from default and defilement.

2. The wisdom and justice of God in it. He hath many wise ends to be accomplished by these mixed providences.

[1.] That a people worn out with long misery may be more pliable to God's purpose. By such mixed providences God will weaken and waste stubborn nature, and cause them to be tossed up and down, that by the protraction of their miseries he may work them to his own bent. A cloud that is soon blown over, and doth only wet us a little in the passing, is not regarded; but when the conflict is long between light and darkness, sunshine and storms, and our miseries continue longer, it doth awaken a people to inquire after God's mind. For a great while a people make a light matter of religion, and God's interest in the nation is looked upon as a trifle, not worth the looking after, and therefore is there such slight reformation; but before God hath done with them they shall see that his interests are to be regarded as well as other rights of man. Surely God hath some notable work to do upon England, or else he would not pursue us with so many effects of his anger and break us with so many changes and distractions. Are all these shakings to no purpose? and to leave us there where God found us at first? as unholy and unreformed as before? Surely, then, it will be utter ruin: Ezek. xxiv. 13, 'Because I would have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any

more.' But God seemeth not to leave England so. He would say, Let them alone: Hosea iv. 17, 'Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone.' As it is with a natural body, when corruption hath seized upon the vital parts, the body must be brought very low, and just kept alive, that a better spring of blood may be procured; the wise physician giveth nothing for a while that may strengthen nature, lest it strengthen the disease; so when corruptions are so inveterate, rooted in men's minds, God doth wear us out with a continual vicissitude and interchange of providences. His dispensations are somewhat like those supplies the Athenians gave to a lingering war, just enough to keep it up, not to end it. Demosthenes compareth them to a medicinal diet, which neither strengthens nor suffers to die, till it groweth to a lingering mischief. As by the motions of his Spirit, so by the courses of his providence: Job xxxiii. 14, 'God speaketh once, and twice, and man perceiveth it not.' God is loath to be gone and make it whole night, and loath to tarry and make it perfect day, but sometimes one party prevaileth, sometimes another. Oh! that we were wise!

[2.] To work us from earthly things to things heavenly. In heaven there is no night, but all day. There is no stability in outward comforts, that we may look higher, and get 'the moon under our feet,' Rev. xii. 1. All sublunary things are liable to changes. We are eagerly bent upon temporal happiness, and would seek our rest here, but that God maketh all unquiet to drive us higher, Mat. vi. 19, 20. Here is slandering and violence. Noah's ark, when it was tossed upon the waves, was the nearer to heaven; so the more we are tossed upon the unstable waters, the more should we look after the place of our eternal rest, where we shall be for ever with the Lord.

[3.] To put a cloud and veil upon his proceedings. There is a foolish curiosity that doth possess us; we are usually earnest to know the event, but slack to use the means; it is natural to us to inquire after what is to come, and to neglect present duties. Now no creature shall know the bottom of his counsels, Isa. xlv. 15. When he meaneth to be a saviour, the world shall not know so much, but things are kept in a doubtful uncertainty, and we cannot say whether they tend to ruin or establishment: Eccles. vii. 14, 'In the days of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God hath set the one against the other, to the end that man may find nothing after him;' that man may not be able to look to the end of God's design, who would either slacken his duty or choose his party, not upon reasons of conscience, but carnal motives; and therefore, when man is upon his trial, the face of things looketh doubtfully, Isa. xlvi. 7, and John xiii. 7.

[4.] To prevent the excesses of either condition, God tempereth and qualifyeth the one with the other. Prosperity maketh us grow wanton, adversity stupid; therefore, that we may mourn as if we mourned not, and rejoice as if we rejoiced not, 1 Cor. vii. 31, we are exercised with various changes. Out of indulgence to us he giveth us prosperity, lest we should be overwhelmed with sorrow; and then adversity again for the abuse of prosperity; the one is set against the other, to keep the soul in an equal temper and poise. In adversity we think we shall never be delivered, in prosperity never moved. Now, to keep the soul

steady, God seemeth to hover, and the face of providence looketh with a doubtful uncertainty. Especially are we apt to be corrupted with prosperous things; as Hezekiah, 2 Chron. xxxii. 25. When stormy winds fill the sails, it is hard to go steady. It is certainly an help to inure our thoughts to changes; but when we are well at ease we are apt to forget. Few say, as David, Ps. xxxix. 5 'Surely man at his best estate is altogether vanity.' We should rejoice with trembling. The Egyptians used to present a death's-head at their feast. Leaven (which was forbidden in other sacrifices, Lev. ii. 11), was allowed in thank-offerings, Lev. vii. 13; and Amos iv. 5, 'Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven.' Leaven made bread sour to taste. When we offer praise for any benefits and deliverances, we should still entertain suitable thoughts of the bitterness to which we are incident during the present state. That we may neither surfeit in prosperity nor despond in adversity, neither wax wanton nor be swallowed up of sorrow, God giveth us such intermixtures of providences.

[5.] To make way for the exercise of our faith; therefore, in the tenor of his providence, God doth so govern and order his providential dispensations towards his people, that they shall not live by sense but by faith. To make this evident, let me tell you five possible ways of providence may be imagined. The first is, that the righteous shall always see good, and the wicked suffer evil. The second, that the righteous shall always be afflicted, and meet with nothing but evil in the world, and the wicked be always prosperous, and enjoy good. The third, that both good and evil men should always be afflicted, and never see good day in the world. The fourth, that both good and bad men should be always prosperous, and never troubled with any evil. The fifth, that neither to all the righteous or all the wicked there should be evil and only evil, or good and only good, but a mixture of both; to the good sometimes good, and to the evil sometimes evil. Now, though all these ways of providence might be just, yet God doth only the first and the last of these; the first in the world to come, the last in the present life; that is to say, that the righteous should enjoy good, and only good, and the wicked evil and only evil. This is the dispensation which God reserveth for the world to come, where the good are always and completely blessed, and the wicked are always and completely miserable. The last, God hath chosen for this world, a mixture of good and evil promiscuously dispensed; that is to say, that some good men shall enjoy more of worldly prosperity, others be kept low and bare; as we read of a poor Lazarus resting in a rich Abraham's bosom, Luke xvi. 23; and that there should be vicissitudes in the same person; some comforts, some crosses. On the other side, the wicked should be sometimes mighty and prosperous, 'not plagued like other men,' Ps. xiii. 5; and sometimes that the iniquity of their heels should cleave to them. There are intermixtures, that neither the righteous nor the wicked may be known by their outward condition. Why? Because the present state is a state of faith, not a state of sense, Acts ii. 6, 7. We are justified by faith, we live by faith, we walk by faith, and not by sight; therefore this state of faith requireth that the manner by which God governeth the world should neither be too sensible and clear nor too obscure and dark, but a middle thing, as the daybreak or twilight is between

the light of the day and the full darkness of the night. If too clear, we should not need faith. If too obscure, we should wholly lose faith. Therefore, the first way of providence is not fit for the present world, that the godly shall always be happy and flourish, and have all things according to their heart's desire, and the wicked always in troubles and calamities. This would make religion too sensible a thing, unfit for the present time, when we walk by faith and not by sense. If the world were so governed, it could not be put to any trial; and temporal things, the good and evil of the present time, would be the great motives to induce men to serve God and avoid sin. Therefore, that men may live by faith, and look for a better reward of righteousness, and a greater punishment of sin, God will not always observe this law and course in his dispensations, to bestow upon the good the blessings of the world, and inflict upon the evil the punishments thereof; but promiscuously give good things to the wicked, that they may not be thought the chiefest good, and sometimes he will bestow them upon the good, that the very possession of these may not be thought evil. Sometimes he will be glorified by his servants in a high and prosperous, and sometimes in a low and afflicted condition; and they shall enjoy vicissitudes and interchanges; sometimes no complainings in their families, sometimes great breaches made upon them. Therefore the first way may be fit for heaven, not fit for earth. It would make all things too liable to sense if God had distinguished men by their outward condition. No; in these things he dealeth promiscuously: 'All things come alike to all,' Eccles. ix. 2. He doth not promiscuously dispense the riches of his grace; these are invisible treasures. His Christ, his Spirit, the hopes of glory, he giveth only to the good; but health, wealth, beauty, strength, success, children, are promiscuously given to good and bad; and God will take them, as well as give them, at his pleasure.

But now, all the other ways of providence, as the second, third, fourth, would too much obscure the providence of God, and hinder faith; as the second, that the righteous should always see evil, and the wicked enjoy the good things of this world. Alas! if we were held always in misery and affliction, and the wicked should always wallow in pomp, and ease, and plenty, it would be a grievous temptation to the weak to deny providence; yea, the faith of the strongest would be grievously shaken; for we cannot expect that the good should be perfect in an instant, and presently dead to all temporal interests. If now, when we see some good ones oppressed whilst the evil rejoice, we be so apt to question, as the Israelites, Exod. xvii. 7, 'Is the Lord amongst us, yea or no?' or as David, Ps. lxxiii. 13, 'Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and in vain have I washed my hands in innocency;' what would be done then? and who could keep his patience and keep his faith if the wicked were always kept in joy and triumph whilst the godly are in tears? Therefore God mixeth his dispensations. Sometimes, to exercise our faith and patience, he denieth many things to his friends which he bestoweth upon his enemies; yet often, on the other side, punisheth the wicked and rewardeth the godly, to show his providence. And so faith is neither made void by too great a light, nor extinguished by too great a darkness.

The third sort of providence, that both should be always miserable, both wicked and godly; for if both were alike afflicted there would be no knowledge of the goodness of God till the world to come, no invitations to repentance nor sense of the mercy of the creation to invite us to remember God. All our pleasant affections would be useless, and our graces, which serve for delighting in God, be cut off and prevented; the harmony and order of the world disturbed, which hath cast the world into hills and valleys, appoints some to be in prosperity, others in affliction and want, that the happy may have occasions of showing mercy and relieving the miserable; as the great veins in the body abound with blood to fill the lesser. But chiefly God would not then show his bounty to all his creatures as he doth: Mat. v. 45, 'He maketh his sun to arise upon the evil and the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and unjust.' So Acts xiv. 17, 'He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons,' &c. This world is a common inn, where God entertaineth sons and bastards, and seeketh to draw and allure them to repentance by his goodness, Rom. ii. 4. He would have wicked men think whence they have all this wealth, honour and greatness, houses and fields, servants and provisions. Did I bring them into the world with me when I was born, or did a good God provide them for me? No; 'Naked came I into the world.' Did I acquire them by my own wit and industry? No; many that excel me in these things want them. Had I them by inheritance? Who made me to be born of rich parents, not of poor? Many more righteous than I are in a mean estate of life; surely it was God that prevented me with his goodness and mercy, and shall I be unthankful for these benefits? These reasonings would God stir up in the minds of men.

Not the fourth sort of providence, that both should be continually happy; for then there were no room for suffering graces, for the exercise of fortitude and patience, contempt of the world and self-denial. The best would soon forget the world to come. David would not have the Canaanites utterly destroyed to keep Israel in exercise: Ps. lix. 11, 'Slay them not, lest my people forget.' When there was great deliberation in the senate of Rome whether Carthage should be utterly destroyed yea or nay, Scipio was against it, that the Roman youth might be kept in exercise by an emulous city; and the event showed the soundness of his advice, for the ruin of Carthage was the ruin of Rome; for being corrupted by prosperity, they fell into all licentiousness, and for want of a potent adversary to keep them in breath and exercise, fell into destructive divisions and seditions among themselves. It is said, Prov. i. 32, 'The prosperity of fools destroyeth them.' Well, then, you see the reasons of this mixed dispensation.

But is not this contrary to that faith and dependence that we should have upon God for present mercies, when there is such a doubtful face of things that men know not what certainly to expect? for certainty is the ground of faith and close affiance.

I answer—That 'godliness hath the promises of this life, and that which is to come,' 1 Tim. iv. 8; and that verily God doth not cast off his people, and leave them to shift for themselves in temporal things: Ps. xciv. 14, 'For the Lord will not cast off his people, nor forsake



his inheritance.' Men may cast them off, and God may hide himself from them for a while, but yet he taketh care of them. He may for a time correct and chastise them, and permit them for a while to abide under sharp oppressions; yet he will not utterly forsake them, but support and deliver them in his own season. But the faith which is required of us is not a certain expectation of temporal events; there God leaveth it to a may-be. If outward things were sure, we should live by sense rather than faith. God will be waited upon, and therefore keepeth the disposal of all things in his own hand, Jer. ii. 31, keepeth it as doubtful. The true generous faith is not a confidence of particular success, but a committing ourselves to God's power, and referring ourselves to his will; as the leper Mat. viii. 2, 'Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.'

[6.] To win the heart by the various methods of judgments and mercies, and to gain upon us by both means at once: Ps. ci. 1, 'I will sing of judgment and mercy; unto thee, O Lord, will I sing.' It may be neither day nor night, but both together, that our fears and hopes may draw us to God. Mixed graces do best, Acts ix. 33. To increase our fear, God letteth out trouble; to encourage us to hoping in God, that trouble is checked by other providences, Cant. iv. 16, Isa. xxvii. 6. The wind bloweth, God keepeth it from growing furious: Ps. cxxxviii. 7, 'Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me;' as putting life into his affairs.

[7.] God doth it to bring his people to a christian union and accord. God will not hear one sort of his people against another. When religious interest is divided, God keeps the balance equal, and success is sometimes cast on this side, sometimes on that. The light shineth sometimes in one hemisphere, sometimes in another; every party cometh on the stage, have their success, and manifest their corruptions, cannot bear one with another. God breaketh this confidence and that, then draweth to an union. That at length we may lay down our enmities and oppositions, and 'not bite and devour one another, lest at length we be consumed one of another,' Gal. v. 15. Sometimes the strength and upper-hand is given to these; they carry the day, but not the complete victory. What doth this intimate but that we should end the difference by compromise and reconciliation, lest, while we weaken one another by our mutual differences, the whole church be made a prey to Satan and his emissaries, and inevitable ruin and destruction light upon the whole. What have we gained by our contests? Stumbling-blocks are multiplied, atheists are increased. Oh! when shall that spirit prevail—'There is a tribe lacking in Israel?' Judges xxi. 8, 9. Though they fought against them, yet they owned them as brethren. Alas! one faction is getting the ball from another, and our church divisions are but like a game at football. Surely, though two seeds will not be reconciled, yet God's family may be reconciled. Now where principles are such as may let in somewhat of Christ, we should try all means; we cannot wholly separate till our master be gone before us. If they fly from peace, we must pursue it, Mat. v. 9.

[8.] To prevent contempt and insolency towards those that are fallen under God's displeasure. This is to 'persecute them whom

God hath smitten, and to speak to the grief of those whom God hath wounded,' Ps. lxxix. 26; Prov. xxiv. 17, 'Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth; lest the Lord see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.' A vindictive spirit is a transgression of God's law. To rejoice and insult over misery is the worst sort of revenge.

[9.] It is a ground of patience: 'Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and not evil?' Job ii. 10. Heavy afflictions want not their comforts to make them tolerable. We want not mixtures to support us. He measureth out good and evil with a great deal of wisdom and tenderness. Should not they which have received good things from the Lord be content to submit to evil things or afflictions, when God seeth meet to exercise them therewith? The tide will ebb and flow. We would have it always flow; but God will not ask our leave and consent, and govern affairs by our opinion, but will send good and evil as it pleaseth him. Therefore, as we receive and entertain good things thankfully and cheerfully, so it is our duty to receive evil things submissively and contentedly. It is a great fault to limit God to one way of dealing with his people, and that we cannot endure changes. We must resolve for good and evil, and prepare for it, Phil. iv. 12. Vicissitudes in our condition are necessary for us. A settled ease in the world would soon corrupt us. In short, God freely conferreth good things upon us; and therefore we should not take it ill if sometimes he maketh us taste the bitter fruits of our own deservings. A christian should be prepared for new assaults of trouble.

[10.] To show that our comforts and crosses are in his hand; and he doth variously dispense weal or woe as our condition doth require: Isa. xlv. 7, 'I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these things.' So Job xxxiv. 29, 'When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only.' God diversifieth his providence, that if we will not take notice of him in one dispensation, we may in another. So Ps. lxxiv. 16, 17, 'The day is thine, and the night is thine; thou hast prepared the light and the sun; thou hast made summer and winter.' It is spoken of a deep time of trouble. He that hath set winter and summer, day and night, one against another, hath set good and evil in the life of man. You must not so understand it as if good came from God, and evil from ourselves, or by chance. No; God's hand is to be seen and owned in both. He is our party; therefore our first business is to reconcile ourselves to God, to please him, to bear the evil patiently, to accept the good thankfully from his hand. None can resist or remedy what God is pleased to do, 2 Chron. xxv. 8. God hath power to help and power to cast down; and in both he worketh sovereignly and irresistibly. Dangers and deliverances, troubles and consolations, come all from him. He will put us upon various exercises, fearing, believing, trembling, rejoicing, mourning, giving thanks.

*Application.* Now what use should we make of all this?

1. Be sure you do not make an ill use of it.

[1.] When we are not thankful for our mercies because they are not full and perfect. That is a proud and murmuring spirit that entertaineth crosses with anger and blessings with disdain. What but this is spoken of, Mal. i. 2, 'Wherein hast thou loved us?' and Ps. lxxviii. 20; as the people murmured in the wilderness, when they were come out of Egypt; when we disvalue what we have in comparison of what we expect. Pliny speaketh of some, *Quantumlibet saepe obligati, hoc solum meminerunt quod negatum est*—Forget 'what is granted, pitch only upon what is denied; as children in a pet throw away what they have if you do not give them more: 'All this,' saith Haman, 'availeth me nothing,' Esther v. 13. As in the body, if one humour be out of order, or one joint broken, the soundness of the rest is not regarded, so apt are we to murmur if all be not done at once: though God see it needful to keep us in fears and uncertainties, and you have not all that you look for, yet acknowledge what you have. Do not say, It is but so and so, a truce rather than a peace. God is making a step onward in England's mercies. Many strange providences there are to bring us to this. It is a mercy that he remembered us in our low estate, Ps. cxxxvi. 23, when all was struck at; honour, and religious worship, and property were at stake, that he gave us some breathing and rest after our oppressions, Hosea xi. 4; some ease after toil, as ploughmen give their oxen after they come from labour. And now the union of the parliament with their brethren is a step further; we hope we are growing towards the glorious evening. It is an ill use not to acknowledge mercies if all things are not according to your minds. Do not say, It is but thus and thus: Zech. iv. 10, 'Who hath despised the day of small things?' It is God's way to begin with little things that promise not much; thankfulness is the way to make them greater. God is at work; tarry till he bring it forth to perfection.

[2.] It is an abuse if we are discouraged in God's service because of this uncertainty and the returning of clouds after rain, that you cannot tell whether it will be day or night. You ought to take God's part; as in the combat between flesh and spirit, to come into the relief of the better part; so in this doubtful conflict. (1.) When you have any respite and breathing-time, then is a time and season to put your hand to the work: John ix. 4, 'I must work the works of him that sent me while it is to-day; the night cometh when none can work.' Blessed be God, it is not night with us. Truth is not wholly banished, nor buried under a night of ignorance, error, and superstitions; nor the comfort of prosperity wholly gone. Whilst it is day let us do something for God's interest. (2.) If there be uncertainties, never a great work is brought to pass without troubles, and duty should be welcome to you though you are uncertain of the event. Go about it with a resolute submission to God's will, and as prepared for all weathers, Phil. iv. 11, 12. This is a christian spirit. When you pitch upon temporal happiness altogether, and a settled estate in the world, you will be deceived. (3.) Change cometh not till our condition proveth a snare to us; till we grow neglectful of God and his interest, as if we could do well without him, and use our power against him, and so provoke him to leave us.

2. The right use we should make of it. When we have mixed dispensations, and are under a dubious conflict, then—

[1.] By way of caution, take heed of human confidences, and presuming too much of temporal success by means and instruments. One great reason of this long uncertainty wherewith England is exercised is because we run from one means to another, and do not take up the controversy between us and God. It may be said to us, as to Israel, Jer. ii. 36, 37, Why dost thou run to and fro, one while in this manner, another while in another, to seek establishment here and there, like a sick man turning in his bed? One while they thought the Assyrian would do it, and then the Egyptian. They shifted hands, but still the mischief continued. The Assyrian distressed them, but helped them not: they were disappointed in the Egyptian. Then the threatening is, 'Thou shalt go forth with thy hands upon thy head; for the Lord hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them.' Come back with a heavy heart and dejected habit. As clapping the hands is an expression of joy, so going forth with their hands upon their heads is a sign of great sorrow; as Tamar, when defiled by Amnon, 2 Sam. xiii. 19, 'laid her hand upon her head, and went out crying;' a gesture of lamentation. In the issue it would turn to extreme grief and anguish of heart. It is not improper, now you are met to rejoice in God, to mind you of these things. I do not speak this to take you off from the use of means, but from trusting in means: Oh! this will do it, and that will do it. I tell you, it is the Lord must do it. But when do we trust in means? When we use the creature without God, and hope to work out our ends without giving God his ends, Jer. iv. 14. To get rid of misery by fleshly aid, human force and counsel, without humiliation and repentance, and serious returning to the Lord. When we set the creature against God by wicked combinations, and cover it with a covering, that we may add sin to sin, Isa. xxx. 1. To carry on an evil purpose, to countenance lewdness, that a profane spirit may again come upon the stage and sin triumphantly. If we have this in design, it is to set means against God. Sometimes we set up the creature above God, as if his blessing were nothing to human preparations; and our hearts run more upon outward helps than his favour and blessing, Jer. ii. 13; and Hosea v. 13, 'When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then Ephraim sent to king Jareb, yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound.' Sometimes we yoke the creature with God, when we confine his providence to our probabilities, as if God could work no other way but that which we fancy: Ps. lxxviii. 41, 'They turned back, and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.' We do no more than we see reason for in the course of second causes. I tell you, God is the main party: it is with him this nation hath to do; it is not with unquiet libertines, with open enemies, but with God.

[2.] For direction—

(1.) Walk by a sure rule: Ps. cxix. 105, 'Thy word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path.' Civil interests are determined by the laws of the country where we live. So far as concerneth conscience, the word of God is a rule and sure direction. When you consult with it, What

would God have me to do in such a case? you shall be sure to know his mind and your own duty, and so can suffer and act the more cheerfully.

(2.) Get a sure guide: Prov. iii. 5, 6, 'Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not to thy own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' We have no more understanding than as God is pleased to confirm to us from day to day. Magistrates are bidden to be instructed: Ps. ii. 10, 'Be wise now therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth.' Their good and evil is of a public influence. When men make their bosom their oracle, their own wits their counsellor, especially when swayed by their passions and corrupt affections, they usually miscarry.

(3.) Encourage yourselves by the sure promises that you have to build upon: 'The sure mercies of David,' Isa. lv. 3. The righteous have a sure reward. Prov. xi. 18, 'To him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.' Heaven is a kingdom that cannot be shaken: Heb. xii. 28, 'Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.' There are great alterations here, but in heaven all is stable; there is joy without any mixture of sorrow, no misery, no weakness to perplex. In short, a man wrapt up in the peace of God, and the quiet of a good conscience, and hopes of eternal life, is fortified against all encounters, storms, and difficulties whatsoever.