

THE LIFE OF FAITH IN PRAYER.

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering ; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.—
 JAS. i. 6.

I SHALL from this text further treat of the life of faith. Having spoken of the influence and use of faith upon obedience, or the duties of holiness in general, I shall now speak of the use of faith in prayer.

In the context there is an exhortation to prayer, and in the text an instruction how we should pray.

1. There is an exhortation to prayer in the fifth verse—‘If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God.’ He presseth us to make an advantage of our wants, and to look upon them as so many occasions of recourse to God at the throne of grace ; and he encourageth them, partly by the consideration of God’s nature—‘Who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.’ We need not make scruples of consulting with God upon every occasion ; he is not backward to bestow grace, nor is he wont to reproach those to whom he giveth anything ; though prayer putteth God to it never so often and never so much, yet he upbraideth none. And then he encourageth them partly by a promise—‘Let him ask, and it shall be given him.’ It is said of Augustus that he never sent away any from him sad ; it is true of the Lord, he doth not send away his worshippers sad—‘Ask, and it shall be given you ;’ prayer will not be a fruitless labour.

2. In the text there is an instruction how we should pray, which is laid down and enforced.

[1.] It is laid down to prevent mistakes—‘Let him ask in faith.’

[2.] It is enforced by a reason *ab incommodo*, from the inconveniency of not asking in faith—‘For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.’ Wavering and doubting keep men in a perpetual tempest and agitation of mind, roving to and fro from one dependence to another, as the waves of the sea are carried hither and thither.

Doct. That none pray aright, but those that pray in faith.

Faith is all in all in prayer—‘The prayer of faith shall save the sick,’ James v. 15. It is not prayer simply, but the faith in prayer that prevaileth with God for a gracious answer ; so Mat. xxi. 21, 22, ‘If ye have faith, and doubt not, . . . all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.’ The grant and answer is suspended upon that condition, for God will not exercise his power till we rest upon it. In short, faith and prayer are inseparable companions, like Hippocrates’ twins, they live and die together ; they are begotten together, and grow up together, and die together.

1. They are begotten together, for faith beginneth its life in crying unto God. The first grace that is acted is faith, and the first duty when grace is infused is prayer : Zech. xii. 10, ‘I will pour upon them the spirit of grace and supplication ; and Paul after his conversion, the first news we hear of him is, ‘Behold, he prayeth,’ Acts ix. 11. As

the new-born babe falls a-crying ; so, as soon as we are born again, the first work that is set upon is prayer.

2. They grow up together, mutually strengthening and increasing, and setting one another a-work : Ps. lxi. 8, 'Trust in the Lord at all times, pour out your hearts before him.' Trust vents itself in prayer, and prayer increaseth trust, for in prayer the principles of confidence are solemnly drawn into the view of conscience.

3. Because they end together. When we come to die, faith is resolved into sight, and prayer into an uninterrupted praise.

Now for the clearing of this point—

First, I shall show you what is that faith that is requisite in prayer. Divers thoughts and opinions there are about it : I will not perplex you with them, but conceive it thus : it is a confidence that our prayers shall be heard ; that is the faith that is required in prayer : 1 John v. 14, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.'

This confidence that we shall be heard containeth many things in it.

1. A believing that there is a God, or else why should we pray unto him ? Heb. xi. 6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him ;' otherwise all our devotion will be but customary and for fashion's sake, or a compliance with the vulgar error ; as one called it, *eamus ad communem errorem*, when he spake of the worship of God. Unless we have this persuasion that God is, all is nothing.

2. That he is such an infinite being that he can supply all the wants of the creatures, and accomplish all their desires : Eph. iii. 20, 'Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.' This is a main prop of confidence in prayer, that God is able not only 'to exceed our prayers, but our conceptions and hopes : so 2 Chron. xx. 6, And he said, O Lord God of our fathers ! art not thou God in heaven ? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen ? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee ?' Faith sets prayer a-work, and prayer sets the almighty power of that God a-work, and hath a universal empire and dominion over all the world, and all the events and affairs of the world ; and therefore our Lord Jesus Christ layeth down this as a ground for prayer—'Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory ;' he can set all things a-work for the glory of his name, and for the good of his people.

3. That he is omniscient as well as omnipotent, he knoweth what we do and speak, when and where any poor creature is praying to him : Acts ix. 11, 'Arise, and go into the street that is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold he prayeth.' God observeth you in your most private and secret retirements ; in what corner of the house soever we are, he knoweth what we are a-doing, whether we are toying or praying, for it is said in what street Saul was, and in what house, and what he was doing : so Mal. iii. 16, 'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to the other, and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought

upon his name.' God taketh notice of every word we speak to him, or of him, or for him. We cannot hear many speaking at once, because we are finite creatures, but God heareth all the world over, and knoweth how to interpret the secret groans and motions of the heart: Rom. viii. 27, 'He that searcheth the heart knoweth the mind of the Spirit.' We do not speak to an absent God, but to one that looks into the secret corners of our heart, to one that is always present and near at hand.

4. That God is ready to hear and answer our prayers: Ps. lxxv. 2, 'O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.' He hath taken the name upon him of a God hearing prayer; it is his nature and property, it is his work and constant practice; what hath God been doing for thousands of years, but receiving the addresses of his people? yea, it is his delight and glory, he will be known by it; therefore he is called the 'Father of mercies,' 2 Cor. i. 3, as being the fountain of all grace, and 'rich in mercy to all that call upon him,' Rom. x. 12. He is more ready to give than we are to ask; yea, he giveth unasked, and more than we ask; and his quarrel with us is, because we do not ask enough.

5. That God will stand to his word, which is the rule of commerce between him and his creatures. This assurance he hath given to the church: Ps. cxxxviii. 2, 'Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name,' that is, above all that is famed and spoken of God; you have him punctual in making good his promises. The heathens had two notions of their gods, that they always kept touch with their worshippers, and were ready to do them good. They are both true of the great and living God whom we serve in the spirit; we may put the humble challenge upon him, and mind him of his word: Ps. cxix. 49, 'Remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope;' and by this we exceedingly encourage ourselves to deal with him, when we have his promise to show for it: 2 Sam. vii. 27, 'For thou, O Lord of Hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed unto thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house, therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee.' The attributes of God apprehended at large have not such a force upon the soul as when he is obliged and bound by his promise, and therefore this is a great holdfast upon God.

6. That God will both accept of our persons and prayers in Christ, the son of his love, in whom he is well pleased: Eph. i. 6, 'Who hath accepted us in the Beloved, to the praise of his glorious grace;' this is the proper ground of prayer. Christ was sparingly revealed in the old testament, yet when they prayed, they looked towards the temple, where were the figures, and symbolical representations of Christ; yea, some of them spake out: Dan. ix. 17, 'Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary, that is desolate, for the Lord's sake.' Jesus Christ was a mediator to the church in the old testament, but sparingly known; but now to us he is plentifully made known: Eph. iii. 12, 'In whom we have boldness, and access with confidence, by the faith of him.' Our encouragement of pleading, and our hopes of acceptance, must be grounded upon his merit and intercession, and the Father's love to him, and to poor sinners in and through him.

7. Out of all this there resulteth an actual reliance upon God, according to these terms, for the acceptance of our persons, and the answer of all our requests and supplications: 1 John v. 15, 'And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.' Keep to the rule of prayer, ask the things that are agreeable to God's will and conducive to his glory, and fit for us to receive in our station, and then though they be ever so difficult, ever so many in number, ever so presently needed, we are confident we shall have the petitions we ask. Indeed it doth not open a door for us to expect the fulfilling of all our desires, and promises of our own making; if we interpret it so, it is horrible presumption, as you know it is to forge a bond; this maketh for God's dishonour, and is an ungrounded confidence; but ask regularly, according to God's will, you may be sure God will grant what you ask.

But how can we thus rely upon God, and have confidence that we shall be answered in all our particular requests, since mercies asked are so various, some absolutely promised, and some only conditionally, and temporal things are not always granted in kind.

Ans. 1. Prayer may be heard when it is not answered with success; Daniel was heard as soon as he prayed: Dan. ix. 23, 'At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth;' but yet, Dan. x. 12, 13, there was some stop, and some time before it could be brought about. The Lord heareth presently, but giveth in comfort afterwards; prayer put up in Christ's name gets a hearing presently, and in time gets an answer. God will exercise our faith for a while, to believe this, though we see it not; and he will exercise our patience for a while, to wait for his leisure, and in the meantime enticeth us to believe that prayer is heard, when it is not answered in kind. Therefore we must distinguish between God's hearing, ^{is able} answering the prayers of his saints; God will take his own ^{time} ^{to} ² ⁶ and time for giving in answers of prayer to his people. Mordecai's name stood in Ahasuerus's books some time before his honour was conferred upon him. You may not hear of God for a good while, but you shall hear of him at length. Abraham prayed for a child, but many years intervened before he had him in his arms. Our Lord Jesus Christ was heard as to the success of his death, in the victory over his enemies, but not as to the taking away of the cup: Heb. v. 7, 'Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.'

2. We may be sure that prayers are granted, so far as they are asked regularly: 1 John v. 14, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.' What is it to ask according to his will? It concerns the person, the matter, the manner, and the end of prayer; *si boni petant bona, bene, ad bonum.*

[1.] The person or the petitioner, he must be one that serveth God: 1 John iii. 22, 'And whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.' He that serveth God and pleaseth God is sure to be accepted; so James v. 16, 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man

availeth much.' What have others to do to come in Christ's name? Naturalists speak of a jewel of great virtue, which, being put into a dead man's mouth, loseth all its virtue; so prayer, though it be of wonderful use and virtue, yet put into the mouth of a dead man, one that is dead in trespasses and sins, and is not made alive by Christ, it is of no virtue and efficacy with God.

[2.] For the matter, it must be according to the will of God; it must be good and lawful, such things as God seeth fit for us; it must be conformable to his revealed will, and with submission to his secret will; not contrary to his word, nor against his decrees.

(1.) It must be according to his revealed will. The throne of grace is not set up that we may come and vent our sudden distempered passions before the Lord, or to set God a task to provide meat for our lusts. When the disciples would have called for fire from heaven, Luke ix. 54, 55, Christ saith unto them, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.' We are soon transported into uncomely passion, and we would have enemies confounded. Many times a child of God goes on the devil's errand; we are his messengers when revenge sets us a-work.

(2.) With submission to his secret will; Mat. xxvi. 39, 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.' Christ, as mediator, was subject to his Father's will. So we pray aright when we pray that if God see it good for us, to give the thing we desire; if it be hurtful to us, God will not hear; in that case denying is a greater mercy than granting. As the heathens observed it too great a facility in their gods to grant men their wishes to their ruin. Herod was too lavish when he gave his minion leave to ask what she would to the half of the kingdom.

[3.] The will of God falleth upon the manner too; it must be with fervency, that our hearts may be upon the work: Mat. vii. 7, 'Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' We must return upon God with renewed importunity.

[4.] The will of God falleth upon the end too: James iv. 3, 'Ye ask, and receive not; because you ask amiss, to consume it upon your lusts.' God will not provide meat for our lusts; this were to debauch the throne of grace.

3. I answer, that faith is to be acted in prayer for temporal mercies; for both spiritual and temporal mercies and blessings are promised, and whatever is the matter of a promise is the object of faith. God will be as punctual in the lesser matters which concern the present life, as in the weightier matters that concern thy eternal happiness; so that he will either give them *in specie*, in kind, or in value. It is fit that God should judge of it, whether a temporal enjoyment will be good for us, or when he will give something in lieu of it; we are to acquiesce in his good providence for our provision here, as well as our salvation hereafter. He is willing to take our care from us, Phil. iv. 6, 7; he intends not our loss, but our ease; he will provide for us, and in the issue will give us a full account of his love and faithfulness.

4. To act faith in prayer for temporal mercies is not to believe that we shall have them *in specie*, in kind, but faith is to rely upon God's power, submitting to his will: Mat. viii. 2, 'If thou wilt, thou canst

make me clean.' Unbelief thinks little of an invisible hand, and saith, 'Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?' Doubting of God's power is the great thing that unbelief stumbleth at; we must not conclude against his will, but refer all things to his will, well knowing that he is a good God, and a wise God, not troubling ourselves about events, but determining that he will cast all things for the best. This is the faith that we are to have in conditional promises.

Secondly, Let me show you the necessity of praying in faith.

1. Without faith prayer is not acceptable to God: Heb. xi. 6, 'Without faith it is impossible to please God.' God doth not look to the eloquence of a prayer; carnal men, that have no grace, may have great gifts of speech and flowing of language; nor doth God look merely to the ardour of affection, for lust may make men earnest, and beget in us rapid motions; but he looks to the prayer of faith.

2. No prayer hath life in it but what is made in faith: Rom. x. 14, 'How shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed?' It is but a mocking of God, to pray to him, unless we expect good of it; we do but come and repeat words for fashion's sake if we do not pray in faith. Why should we address ourselves to him, if we make a question of his power and good-will to help us?

3. Faith is necessary, that we may not be dismayed with the difficulties and seeming impossibilities of obtaining what we need and ask according to God's will. Many times mountains must be removed: Mat. xxi. 21, 'If ye have faith, and doubt not; . . . If ye say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and cast into the sea, it shall be done.' It is true, not only in the age of miracles, but in all ages, here are still mountains of oppositions, difficulties which seem as impossible to remove as a mountain. Now this would shut up our mouths, and make us languish in despair, if there were not faith to remove these mountains: Zech. iv. 7. 'Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.' Faith apprehends nothing too hard for God. How contemptible are those difficulties to a lively active faith? Who art thou, O mountain?

4. Faith is necessary, that we may resolve to stick fast to God, without carnal shifts, whatever cometh of it, and not to use any means of deliverance, but what are every way consistent with our duty to God. I take this to be the case of the text; he speaks this when christians had divers cases to be resolved, saith he, 'Let us pray in faith, nothing wavering;' and in ver. 8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways:' he is divided between God and the world, and in doubt whether the ways of God be still to be adhered to and owned, and whether we should continue waiting upon God quietly, however things succeed with us, or else shift for ourselves. This man is in a wavering condition; and therefore to keep us in a close adherency to God, and in a quiet dependence upon him for the issue of all our troubles, there is need of faith; for he that cannot trust God cannot long to be true to him. Therefore 'let him ask in faith,' that is, adhering to God's all-sufficiency; he that is persuaded of God's power and good-will, and doth refer himself to him, to bear him out in his duty, this man will be faithful to God.

5. Faith is necessary, that we may wait God's leisure: Hab. ii. 3,

‘The vision is for an appointed time ;’ we must not be too hasty : Isa. xxviii. 16, ‘ He that believeth will not make haste.’ Precipitancy is the cause of much evil ; Saul could not tarry till Samuel came, but would go and offer sacrifice himself, and that lost him his kingdom. So when we are hasty, and cannot tarry the Lord’s coming, we miscarry.

Use 1. Here is reproof—

1. To them that will not pray, when God alloweth us, yea, commands us, to pray in faith, and with a confidence that we shall speed the better. If there were but a loose possibility, we should pray : Acts viii. 22, ‘ Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee ;’ it is a very great difficulty, yet pray ; so Exod. xxxii. 30, ‘ And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin, and now I will go up unto the Lord, peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin ;’ so 2 Kings xix. 4, ‘ It may be the Lord thy God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh ;’ so Joel ii. 14, ‘ Who knoweth, but the Lord will return, and repent, and leave a blessing behind him ?’ Faith can stand upon one weak leg ; if there be but a ‘ may be,’ we should go to the throne of grace.

2. It reproveth those that do not look for any success in prayer, that pray only out of course, and throw away their prayers ; as children shoot away their arrows, and never look after them any more ; that do not gather up the fruit of their prayers : Ps. v. 3, ‘ In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up ;’ and Hab. ii. 1, ‘ I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower and will watch to see what he will say unto me.’ He was spying and observing what came in by his dealing with God in prayer ; he was looking to see the blessing coming. Besides, when we do not look after the success of our prayers, we lose many gracious experiences that would confirm our faith : Ps. xviii. 30, ‘ The word of the Lord is a tried word.’ I have found that it is not time lost to go and plead the promises with God. And it will awaken our love : Ps. cxvi. 1, ‘ I will love the Lord, because he hath heard the voice of my supplication ;’ and it will quicken us to holy living, and a life of praise.

3. It reproveth those that have many doubtings and dark thoughts about what they pray for, about the mercy and power of God ; this is an evil incident to God’s own children. There is a twofold unbelief, a reigning unbelief, and a doubting unbelief. The reigning unbelief is in those that were never acquainted with God : Mal. iii. 14, ‘ Ye have said, It is in vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances ?’ But then there is a doubting unbelief, which is a weakness left upon the saints, which though it make their prayers very uncomfortable, yet it doth not make void their prayers—‘ O thou of little faith ! wherefore didst thou doubt ?’ Mat. xiv. 31. Peter ventured out of the ship at Christ’s call, but his feet were ready to sink ever and anon. David was surprised with this unbelief, but the Lord heard him : Ps. xxxi. 22, ‘ I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes : nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplication when I cried unto thee.’ If faith be weak, we must not cease to pray, but pray the more, that faith may be confirmed, and that we may be assured of God’s favour, and may grow up into a confidence in this duty.

Use 2. Of exhortation, to persuade us to pray in faith. Now to this end, consider what encouragements there are.

1. Consider what assurance Jesus Christ hath given us : John xvi. 23, ' Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.' There is a note of asseveration, ' Verily, verily.' Whatever our doubts and temptations be about it, the word of God is to be tried ; do you think that Christ spake truth when he said, ' Verily, verily.' So John xv. 7, ' If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.' If Christ hath subdued your desires to a submission to God's providence, and to the government of his laws, ask what you will, and it shall be given you ; so John xiv. 13, 14, ' Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.' Christ delighteth in despatching the affairs of his people. As the vision was double, and Pharaoh's dream was doubled for the greater assurance and certainty ; so here Christ inculcateth his speech for the greater confirmation of it, that we may be confident he meant as he spake.

2. In all your prayers to God consider how significant the name of Christ is in heaven. If you come in the sense of your own unworthiness, and desire alone to be accepted in him, you shall not be slighted or neglected. If you send a child or a servant to a friend for a thing in your name, the request is yours ; and he that denyeth a child or a servant, denyeth you. Jesus Christ hath sent you in his name, Go ask in my name ; so that in effect the request becomes Christ's request. God can no more deny your request in Christ's name than he can deny Christ himself.

3. Consider, how much God loveth you : John xvi. 27, ' For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me ;' his heart is upon the things you ask for his glory. Now this is a mighty encouragement ; as when Joab perceived the king's heart was towards Absalom, 2 Sam. xiv. 1, compared with the following verses, he made intercession by the woman of Tekoa. So when your desires are regulated according to his will, and subordinated to his glory, his heart is upon these requests.

4. Consider, the moans of the beasts and other dumb creatures are regarded by him, and will not the Lord hear the prayers and supplications of his people ? Ps. cxlv. 15, 16, ' The eyes of all things wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thy hand and satisfiest the desires of every living thing.' When the creatures gape for their refreshment, God satisfieth them. Now if the Lord hath respect to them, will he not hear his own children ? Luke xii. 24, ' Consider the ravens : for they neither sow nor reap ; which neither have store-house nor barn ; and God feedeth them : how much more are you better than the fowls ?' Such is the Lord's overflowing love, that all the creatures have their wants supplied by his bounty.

5. Consider what kind of prayers have found acceptance with God. Solomon's dream was pleasing to the Lord, 1 Kings iii. 5, compared with vers. 9-13 ; the workings of his heart in his sleep were pleasing to God. Many times through grief, and the prevalency of our distempers, we are hardly able to put prayer into language ; but then

faith can send sighs to heaven. Words are but the outside of prayer; it is the actings of grace that lieth nearer the heart than is the prayer. A dumb beggar can get an alms at Christ's gate by making signs. If we be not tongue-tied with sin, and carnal liberty hath not brought an indisposition upon us; nay, a look finds acceptance with God: Ps. v. 3, 'My voice shalt thou hear in the morning; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.' And the breathing out our souls to God: Lam. iii. 5, 6, 'Thou hast heard my voice; hide not thine ear from my breathing.' Yea, broken words with spiritual affections will be accepted with God; nay, chattering, as Hezekiah chattered like a crane, Isa. xxxviii. 14. Our desires have a loud sound in God's ears: Ps. x. 17, 'Lord, thou hast heard the desires of the humble.' Desires make no sound with men, but with God they have an audible voice. All this being put together, is a great comfort to the soul that God will accept of a sigh, a groan, a look, a desire, a dream; these are more acceptable to him than the pen of a ready writer, more than when we flow in words without spirit, life, and affection.

6. Consider the condescension of God, in parables relating to this matter, Luke xi. 8; he speaketh there of a man that would not rise to give loaves to another because he was his friend; yet because of his importunity, he would not be gone else, he arose and gave him. So Luke xviii. 3-5, there was a clamorous widow and an unjust judge; he would not avenge her of her adversary for her sake, yet he did it, for his own sake, and for his own quiet, 'lest by her continual coming she weary me.' In these parables there is a condescension to our suspicious thoughts, as if God had said, I know you think me tenacious and hard-hearted, that I am not willing to give grace; I know these are your secret thoughts, yet if I were so, see what importunity will do. Grant it that your supposition were true, yet it becometh you to pray, and to be earnest and instant, and see what I will do for you.

Use 3. If none pray aright but those that pray in faith, then let us examine ourselves—Do we pray in faith? How shall we know that?

Ans. By three things.

1. By the serenity and composure of your spirits in prayer. Hannah, when she had poured out her heart before the Lord, 1 Sam. i. 18, it is said, 'she went away, and her countenance was no more sad;' so when thou hast made thy moan to God, thou findest a great deal of ease and comfort come of it. As when the wind is shut up in the bowels of the earth it causeth terrible convulsions and earthquakes till it get a vent; so there are many tempestuous agitations and workings of heart in us; but then a believer can go to God, and there ease his heart by pleading his case before the Lord.

2. When thou continuest praying, though God seemeth to deny thee; when upon a denial thou dost return and fasten the more upon him; as the woman of Canaan cleaves the closer to Christ the more he seemed to thrust her from him. Christ says to her: Mat. xv. 26, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs;' but she answers, ver. 27, 'Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table.' It is a sign you expect something from God when you will not be put off without it.

3. When you are satisfied with the promise before you enjoy the

thing promised: Ps. lvi. 4, 'In God I will praise his word.' When you can praise God for his word, though as yet you have not the performance; you see the blessing in the root, and this bears up your hearts.

THE LIFE OF FAITH IN HEARING THE WORD.

But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.—HEB. iv. 2.

I AM now to show you the use of faith in hearing of the word.

It hath been sometimes said that there are many good laws, but there wanteth one good law to put them all in execution; so it may be said you often hear good sermons, but there wanteth one good sermon to persuade you to put the rest in practice. This is the design of this text.

The apostle is proving in the context that it concerneth us to take heed, by the example of the Israelites, that we do not miscarry through unbelief. The ground of the argument is, that we have an offer of rest as well as they, a merciful tender of eternal life, which he calleth 'a promise of entering into God's rest,' ver. 1. Though many occasions of getting and doing be spent and gone, yet whilst it is to-day this offer is continued to us; and therefore we should stir up ourselves to lay hold of it in time. For we are in danger as well as the Israelites. Those that have like privileges may expect like judgments if they presume upon them or do not improve them. Yea, we are rather more in danger; the gospel was preached to them but darkly and implicitly, to us more clearly and fully. Canaan was but a type and figure of the heavenly inheritance or eternal rest to be obtained by Jesus Christ; yet their unbelief was heinous, and cost them dear. The sum of the apostle's reasoning is, they had gospel as well as we, and we shall have judgments as well as they; he giveth a reason of their judgment for our warning,—though they had gospel in the wilderness, 'yet the word preached did not profit them,' &c.

In the words take notice—(1.) Of an event; (2.) The reason of it.

1. The event,—*The word preached did not profit them*; in which assertion we have—

[1.] The subject,—*The word preached, λόγος ἰκοῆς*, the word of hearing, they did, or might hear it,

[2.] The predicate,—*Did not profit them*; that is, they got neither title to nor possession of eternal rest by it. That deserveth the name of profit, because it is the greatest good that God did ever give or man is capable of; and all is nothing without this, loss rather than profit to the soul, whatever we get by it. If a man get knowledge by the word, or honour and credit by the word, by professing or preaching it, yet if he doth not get a title to heaven, or a right to enter into God's rest, he doth not profit by it—'The word did not profit them.'