

SERMON UPON LUKE XXII. 31, 32.

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.—LUKE xxii. 31, 32.

In the words observe two things—(1.) A warning of danger approaching, ver. 31; (2.) A comfort propounded, ver 32.

First, In the first branch observe—

1. The person to whom Christ directeth his words; to Peter, though they concerned all the rest, for it was not him only whom Satan desired to sift, but all of them; but Christ speaks to him in particular, because it most concerned him. The devil would vex all of them, but our Lord foresaw that he would more grievously fall than his fellow-disciples, and, being more fervent and confident than the rest, was more exposed to temptations; and when he addresseth his speech to him, he calleth him not Peter, but Simon. It was, Mat. xvi. 18, 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church;' *q. d.*, the name by which thou art known to me signifieth a rock and stone. But this was when he uttered his good confession; but now he was to be an instance of human frailty, he calleth him not Peter, but Simon. And mark the ingeneration of his name, 'Simon, Simon.' This doubling of his name doth partly intimate affection, and is as much as to say, My dear Simon; partly to stir up a serious attention, that he might mark what is said.

2. The danger itself, 'Behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.' Where observe—

[1.] The author and procurer of this trouble, the devil, called here Satan, that is an adversary. Our danger is mainly from the devil; he hath a great hand in the troubles of God's people. He assaulteth them himself by his wiles, and fiery darts, Eph. vi. 11 and 16, and stirreth up his instruments to persecute them: Luke xxii. 53, 'This is your hour, and the power of darkness.' That was the time when the devil and his instruments were permitted to work their wills on Christ; when the shepherd was smitten, and the flock scattered abroad.

[2.] The way how he bringeth it about, 'He hath desired to have you.' It intimateth two things—

(1.) He asketh leave; for Satan and his instruments cannot touch any of God's children without God's permission; therefore he asketh leave to have the disciples of Christ in his power to vex them. So for Job; he has leave to touch his substance, but must not meddle with his person: Job i. 11, 12, 'But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath; and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power, only upon himself put not forth thy hand.' Then to afflict his body with boils, and sores, but he must spare his life: Job ii. 5, 6, 'But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand, but save his life.' Nay, he was fain to ask leave to enter into the herd of swine: Mat. viii. 31, 'So the devil besought him, saying, if thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.' Surely then the flock of Christ's sheep need not be troubled. If the bristles of the swine be numbered, much more are the hairs of your heads.

(2.) It is a kind of suing out of his right. The word signifieth the putting in of a plea and suit, not a bare asking leave; *ἐξήτησατο ὑμᾶς, poposcit vos ad pœnam*. Sin giveth Satan some right of claim, and when we have committed some sins, we provoke God to give us over to Satan to be disciplined. Therefore this 'desiring to have you' is his accusing you to God, and requiring that he may have the shaking of you. For the devil is an adversary: 1 Peter v. 8, 'Because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.' The word is *ἀντιδικος*, an adversary. Satan is an enemy at law; he is always indicting and accusing you before God, that he may get you into his power and reach. Oh! how watchful should the children of God be, when they have an adversary that pleadeth law and equity on his side, and pursueth his right against them to bring them to the trial! But how could he do so in the case of the apostles, and of Peter in particular? Possibly it might be something criminally done by them in that contention of the disciples about primacy and superiority, who should be chiefest, mentioned ver. 24, 'And there was a strife among them, which of them should be accounted greatest;' and the indignation of the ten against the two brethren, James and John; and in that contest Peter might be most faulty, he being with them too. Those of the disciples whom Jesus most loved, Peter, James, and John, were often admitted to his privacies when others were excluded. Oh! it is a sad thing when we give occasion to Satan to demand us to the judgment.

[3.] His aim and purpose, 'To sift you as wheat,' that is, to toss and shake you as grain in a sieve. The meaning is, the devil would have permission from God wholly to subvert you, and cast you away. A great judgment is expressed by this phrase: Amos ix. 9, 'I will sift the house of Israel among all nations like as corn is sifted in a sieve.' This is the devil's aim, utterly to destroy God's people. But he can obtain no more than to shake and molest them for trial. In sifting, two things are considerable—(1.) The agitation of tossing to the corn, now this way, now that way, from one side to another; (2.) The separation of the wheat from the chaff. The devil only intends the former, but God the latter. He would have Peter and the rest of the apostles

given to him that he might trouble and vex them, and not suffer them to have any rest; but God would turn it to an holy use, to purge you from your dross, your worldly and carnal affections. Satan desireth to trouble us, but thereby God doth cleanse and refine us. He would have liberty to do his worst to drive you from the faith of Christ; but though somewhat of that is granted to him, yet the power of the devil is limited, both as to tempting and hurting. *Cribratione Satance non perditur, sed purgatur frumentum.* The corn is not spoiled but cleansed by Satan's sitting.

Secondly, Here is comfort propounded to sustain them under this great danger; where observe two things—

1. The means of disappointing Satan, 'I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.'

2. The event, delivered in the form of a direction. Peter should recover out of this lapse, and be a means to strengthen others: 'And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.'

1. The means of disappointing Satan, 'I have prayed for thee,' &c. Mark, to Satan's desires there are opposed Christ's prayers. There is more force in Christ's prayers than in Satan's temptations. More particularly consider—(1.) Who prayeth; (2.) For whom he prayeth; (3.) For what.

[1.] Who prayeth; Jesus Christ, the Mediator and advocate of his people. The devil is the accuser, but Christ the advocate, to whose mediation and intercession it must alone be ascribed that we do not finally miscarry. Christ is ready to pray, for he knoweth the heart of a tempted man: Heb. ii. 17, 18, 'Wherefore it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people; for in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.' And his prayer is effectual: John xi. 42, 'And I know that thou hearest me always.' Christ doth not only perfume our prayers, or stay till we pray for ourselves, but prevents them by his own intercession when he foresees the danger.

[2.] For whom he prayeth: 'I have prayed for thee;' that is, for Peter. What! for him only? No; but the rest of the disciples also. The remedy was prepared for them before the trials came, and the plaster fitted before the wound was made. But was it for the apostles only? No, but for all believers: John xvii. 20, 'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.' Christ here upon earth did pray first for the college of the apostles, and then for all believers; so in heaven he hath a watchful care over us, that we may not faint under the temptations of Satan.

[3.] For what he prayeth: 'That thy faith fail not;' that is, may not utterly miscarry. Here observe—

(1.) The grace prayed for, faith, the grace most necessary, and upon which other things depend. All matters that concern Christ and his kingdom depend upon faith: 2 Peter i. 5, 6, 'Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness.' If faith fail not, other graces will not fail: 1 Peter v. 9, 'Whom resist, steadfast in the faith.' And

faith is the grace most assaulted in the present trial ; for Peter was put to it whether he would own and acknowledge Christ to be his Lord and Master. To faith there belong two acts—Believing with the heart, and confession with the mouth : Rom. x. 9, 10, ‘ If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved ; for with the heart man believeth to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.’ This last was put to the trial.

(2.) How far it was prayed for, in the word, ‘ Fail not.’ Christ prayeth not that our faith should never be tried and assaulted, nor that we should be exempted from trouble, but kept from the evil : John xvii. 15, ‘ I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil.’ Not that we should be never oppugned, but not expugned ; neither that it should be not in any degree weakened, but not extinguished. Faith doth not fail totally as to the habit and root of it in their heart, though the habit may be much weakened and diminished, and its proper and natural action obstructed and interrupted, such as is confession with the mouth. Christ foresaw his approaching denial of him, and foretold it ; but Peter did not utterly forsake the faith, as appeareth by his speedy repentance. As a candle smoking and newly blown out easily sucketh light and flame again, so did he recover himself out of that surprise.

2. The event, delivered in the form of a direction ; wherein—

[1.] Is intimated his recovery and being converted. Peter had denied Christ with oaths and execrations, a foul fault ; but Christ recovered him by his look, that no man might despair ; and after his resurrection bringeth him to a threefold confession : John xxi. 15, 16, ‘ Lovest thou me more than these ? and lovest thou me ? and lovest thou me ?’ Now the core of his distemper was gotten out : ‘ Lovest thou me more than these ?’ Is thy love to me so great as thou didst seem to affirm it when thou saidst, ‘ Though all men forsake thee, yet will not I’ ? Is thy love surpassing the love of all other my disciples ? What was Peter’s answer ? ‘ Lord, thou knowest that I love thee ;’ that is, sincerely. Being taught by his smart experience, he dareth not make comparison with all others ; no more comparisons now. Peter had been under a severe discipline, which taught him humility, and before all the disciples he testifieth his repentance, which was first acted in secret. Now he was grown more jealous of himself, he would not boast of such a singular love.

But observe the term, converted. Recovery out of a sore temptation is a kind of second conversion. Grace is battered and bruised, and so many things are necessary to put us in joint again. Denial of Christ, even out of weakness, is a loss not easily recovered. First, Peter had Christ’s look : Luke xxii. 61, ‘ And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter ;’ which pierced his very heart, upon which ‘ he went out, and wept bitterly,’ ver. 62. And then Christ’s message : Mark xvi. 7, ‘ Tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee ; there ye shall see him.’ Be sure to tell Peter, a little to revive and comfort him. He was now full of tears, and grieved at heart for his former offence ; then Christ appeared to him alone, as Luke xxiv. 34, ‘ The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.’ Therefore

the apostle saith, 1 Cor. xv. 5, 'That he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve.' Then afterwards he is brought publicly upon the stage to acknowledge his love to Christ, John xxi. 15-17. So hard a matter is it to set a member in joint again that is once out. So David: Ps. li. 10, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.' He speaketh of it as a second creation and renovation; not that there was a total expulsion of faith or charity, but to show that the loss is not soon repaired.

[2.] There is counsel given him, 'Strengthen thy brethren.' When by repentance thou art recovered out of thy sin, be more careful to confirm and strengthen others.

(1.) To prevent falling, pray for them, warn them, be an example of constancy to them, that they may not fall or fail in like manner; which he did by his threefold profession of love to Christ, and in glorifying God in his whole life and death: John xxi. 19, 'This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.' Christ warneth him of his future sufferings, showing that he should be more stout than in his former trial. Such a difference there was between Peter trusting in his own strength and Peter supported by God. He that before was blown down by the weak blast of a damsel's question, could then confidently look a cruel death in the face.

(2.) Recover them if lapsed with meekness, that they may not despair: Gal. vi. 1, 'If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.' If the possibility of falling be an argument, the actual experience is much more. Christians should not exercise too great severity on them that are fallen, considering we have or we might fall into like sin in the time of temptation. Thus would Christ season and prepare his servants for their office, and by their own experience teach them meekness and tenderness to others. In general it is said, 2 Cor. i. 4, 'Who comforteth us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble with the comforts wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.' Such comforts are not only for our good, but for the benefit and advantage of others. 'Confirm thy brethren,' saith Christ here to Peter. They are brethren, and they need to be strengthened; for all these afflictions are incident to all our brethren which are in the flesh, and our example and consolation from experience are a great relief to them.

Thus you have a full view and prospect of the words. I shall observe this point from the whole.

Doct. That though Satan by God's permission may sorely trouble and vex his people, yet we are not wholly exposed to his fury to be dealt with as he pleaseth. Let me show you how many ways Satan may vex and trouble God's people; either by inward suggestion, or by outward persecution and affliction.

1. By inward suggestions; as when he tempted David to number the people: 1 Chron. xxi. 1, 'Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.' Namely, as he moved him to pride and glory in the arm of flesh, or in his grandeur or multitude of subjects. God had an hand in it: 2 Sam. xxiv. 1, 'And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against

them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah;’ to punish David and his people for their sins, God as a just judge using Satan as his minister therein. God by permission and a wise ordination of it for good, and Satan by suggestion and malicious intention for evil. God as a judge in a just punishment for sin, and Satan as an enemy and an actor of sin. It is no excuse to Satan or David that God moved, nor any blot in God that Satan moved, they acting from diverse principles and diverse ends. Well, but to our present purpose, Satan moved David, a man after God’s own heart. Alas! the best have their infirmities, and Satan hath many hidden secret arts to mischief souls which we think not of.

2. By persecutions or afflictions. Many of Satan’s temptations are conveyed by afflictions, that he may make the people of God weary of their profession, and either quit the truth or cast off their duty to him. Thus when the apostle telleth us of the devil’s unwearied malice and enmity to souls, he biddeth us ‘resist him steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in our brethren which are in the world,’ 1 Peter v. 9. And again, Rev. ii. 10, ‘The devil shall cast some of you into prison.’ Surely they were put in prison by men, but these men were Satan’s instruments. They have their hour sometimes and seasons when they work great trouble to the people of God. God doth not so altogether bind up Satan but that he suffereth him to act many strange parts in the world, either by himself immediately or by his instruments.

Again, our trials are the more sore because Satan hath an hand in them.

1. Not only because that is cumulative to the malice of men, or superadded to it. And so the apostle: Eph. vi. 12, ‘We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickednesses in high places.’ Our business lieth not with men, with flesh and blood only, but with Satan. Men are but the devil’s instruments. Human and bodily powers are Satan’s auxiliaries, whom he stirreth up and employeth; so that there is a double party—the visible agents, and the invisible powers by which they are assisted and acted. But—

2. There are special reasons why the devil is a more terrible and dangerous party than any human power: as partly—

[1.] Because of his great enmity to mankind, especially the redeemed by Christ; because he looketh upon them as likely to possess the vacant places from which he and his angels are fallen. He is always called the enemy with respect to war; adversary, or opposite litigant party, with respect to law

[2.] Partly because of his unwearied activity. He is always going about 1 Peter v. 8, ‘Your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour;’ and in the book of Job, chap. i. 7, ‘From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.’ And—

[3.] Partly for his insatiable cruelty. His malice is bitter and extreme, ‘Seeking whom he may devour.’ His aim is utter ruin and damnation, to prejudice us in our eternal estate or our spiritual and heavenly concernments. It is not your temporal and bodily interests

that he would mainly bereave you of. He can let you enjoy the pleasures of the world that he may deprive you of your delight in God. He can be content that you shall have dignities and honours, ease and safety, so they prove a snare to you; all is to ruin your souls. If he cannot prevail so far, yet he would thereby draw you to scandalous sins, that you may dishonour God: 2 Sam. xii. 14, 'By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme;' and destroy your own peace: Ps. xxxii. 3, 'My bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.'

[4.] Partly for his subtlety. He is of a spiritual nature, and so the devil is invisible both in his nature and approaches, and doth often reach us a deadly blow before we know it is he; and he seeketh by all means to conceal himself: 2 Cor. xi. 3, 'I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve by his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity which is in Christ.' The devil maketh as if he meant all kindness, when he cometh to ruin and destroy souls. He playeth of all hands; tempteth Peter to dissuade, and Judas to betray, and the high priests to persecute. He endeavoureth to keep out of sight, that he may not be seen himself in the temptation, as the fowler and hunter hide themselves till the bird or beast is gotten into the snare or toil. Alas! little do we think the devil is so near, and hath so great an hand in the business which we are about to perform, as we afterwards find him to be. It is not he that seemeth to do it, but such a neighbour, such a minister, or wise man.

3. Why God permitteth this. For many holy and wise reasons.

[1.] To glorify the power of his grace in preserving us: 2 Cor. xii. 9, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.' 'Made perfect,' that is, found or discovered to be perfect; for God's strength cannot be more perfect than it is. There are no degrees in infiniteness, much less can our weakness add anything to it. The meaning is, it is manifested to be perfect. The greater the pressures are, the more visible and conspicuous is the perfection of the divine assistance. More goeth to the keeping of a saint here in the world than to the preserving of an angel; for the angels are *ἔξω βέλους*, out of gunshot and harm's way, but we are making our way to heaven almost every step by conflict and conquest.

[2.] To abate our carnal confidence. For till we have experience of the strength of sin, danger of temptations, and our own weakness, we are too confident of our own resolutions, which, because they are sincere and undissembled, we think they may be easily maintained; therefore God, to show us ourselves, suffereth Satan to tempt us and his instruments to vex us, that by experience we may see how weak that faith is in the temptation which we thought to be strong out of the temptation. This is the meaning of that counsel our Lord giveth his disciples: Mat. xxvi. 41, 'Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' To enter into temptation hath a peculiar sense and signification in that place, and the meaning is, to be overcome by temptations, to enter so as to abide under the power of them, to be encompassed so as we cannot get out. Therefore watch and pray that it be not so with you; for however your mind and resolution be good, and your professions for the time

zealous, yet you may fall from your stoutest resolutions if you be not careful. Or thus, though the spirit or the renewed part be willing to resist and oppose temptations, yet the natural and unrenewed part is weak and ready to be overcome by them. They were confident, secure, and unconcerned when that danger was approaching which would make them either to forsake Christ or to deny and forswear him, as Peter did; therefore it were better for them to be watchful and importunate with God, that they might not be overcome with this temptation. In many cases we find that those that thought their faith strong find it very weak when the temptation cometh: John xvi. 31, 32, 'Do ye now believe? Behold the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone.' There is a great deal of difference between trials in imagination and trials in actual experience. Trials in imagination do not affect us so much, because we only know them at a distance, or by guess and supposition; but evils in sense and feeling are another thing than we could imagine. It is a lamentable thing to see what a cowardly spirit there is in most christians, how soon they are discouraged with every petty assault or slender temptation, and their resolutions shaken with the appearance of any difficulty, how confident soever they were before.

[3.] God sendeth temptations to abate our pride, and so to humble us as well as prove us, that we may not be proud of what we have, or conceit that we have more than we have. Paul giveth this reason: 2 Cor. xii. 7, 'Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelations, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.' There is a difference about the interpretation what this *σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί*, thorn in the flesh, was; either a racking disease or some other sharp affliction. Surely it was not stirrings of sin or some boiling lusts, for Paul was aged, and he would then speak of it in other words. Some think it was some racking disease, like the stake thrust into the fundament of a slave that ran from his master, and came out at his back. Whatever it was, it was a messenger of Satan. Now, whether God would permit Satan to have such power over Paul's body, I leave it to you to consider. Therefore some think it was some sore affliction. In the general, I remember the pricking brier and grieving thorn is put for the despisers and persecutors of Israel: Ezek. xxviii. 24, 'And there shall be no more a pricking brier unto the house of Israel, nor any grieving thorn of all that are round about them that despised them.' This may be called a thorn in the flesh. A sad and sharp affliction questionless it was, inflicted on Paul by the power of the devil. But whatever the event was, God's end was clear, that he might not be elevated with his transcendent revelations: he twice repeateth it, 'Lest I should be exalted above measure.' When the instruments of Satan deal roughly with him, this was designed by God to keep him humble.

[4.] God sendeth these temptations in justice to correct us for other sins: 2 Sam. xxiv. 1, 'The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.' The Lord permitted Satan to move David, as I explained it before; but mark, it was because God was angry with Israel, when they had

abused their plenty and prosperity to licentiousness and forgetfulness of God. Satan is permitted to tempt David, that God might take that occasion to punish them. And it is observed in the censures of the church; a scandalous sinner is 'delivered over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus,' 1 Cor. v. 5; that is, permitted for a while to the devil's power, that he might be recovered to God. And in the text, Satan hath desired, ἐξήγησατο, hath required him of God, demands to have him delivered up to him as to an executioner; and if God thinks fit to answer this request, then he delivereth them up to Satan. Now this should be regarded by us. It is a sad thing when the devil hath a just plea in law against us. The apostle warneth christians 'not to give place to the devil,' Eph. iv. 27. This may be done *effectivè* or *meritoriè*. Effectually, when you comply with his insinuations, and give way to your inordinate passions and carnal affections; then you set open the door to Satan, for he watcheth for any opportunity to recover his old possession and exercise his former tyranny again. Pharaoh was not so hasty to pursue after the Israelites as this malicious spirit is to recover the prey taken out of his hands. When you give way to any known sin, and continue and lie asleep in it, Satan is encouraged and God provoked. And so *meritoriè*; meritoriously you give place to Satan as you make God to withdraw his assistance or to give Satan leave to tempt you: 2 Chron. xxxii. 31, 'God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.' And so fearful havoc is made in the soul, not only of comfort, but grace as to many degrees of it. One sin prepareth for another, as a spark doth for a flame; and the longer and oftener we sin, so much the worse it is for us. Repentance is the sharper, because of the wrong done to God; and the harder, because it is not easy to settle and restore such a soul, that the influences of God's grace and favour may have their wonted course.

4. That God doth not expose us to the fury of Satan, to be dealt with as he pleaseth, but doth bridle and restrain his rage.

[1.] God is the sovereign orderer of this business of temptations. As the shaking and tossing of the saints is by his leave, so is the protection of their faith from his grace. The devil is a creature under government, as all other creatures are; and it is a great comfort to the saints that, when they are in Satan's hands, Satan is in God's hands. Neither the devil nor the world can help or hurt us without his leave. The devils are represented to be 'under chains,' and 'chains of darkness,' Jude 6, 2 Peter ii. 4. These chains are God's irresistible power and terrible justice; either the restraints of his powerful providence, called therefore 'chains,' or the horror of their own despairing fears, called therefore 'chains of darkness.' They can do nothing but as far as God's justice and holy wisdom permitteth them.

[2.] As our protection cometh from God, so it cometh to us by the intercession of Christ, who prayeth for his people; a copy whereof we have, John xvii., and a pledge of which is this. He hath intended his own heart by experience, and so is more likely to pity us: Heb. ii. 18, 'For that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.' There is ability of power, ability of idoneity and fitness, as it is proper and agreeable that he should

become compassionate, and willing to relieve those that fall into the like or same evils, namely, sharp persecutions in this world for his name's sake: Heb. iv. 15, 'He was in all points tempted as we are.' He hath felt the weight and trouble of temptations himself, and will be sensible of our condition; as a man that has had the stone or gout knows better how to sympathise with others in the like case, and as Israel was commanded to be merciful and pitiful to strangers, because they knew the heart of a stranger. *Non ignara mali, miseris succurrere disco.*

[3.] Christ's love is never more at work for us than when under temptations. He hath a tender sense of our danger by Satan. When he followeth them out of malice and spite, then God puts forth the strength and efficacy of his mediation: Zech. iii. 1, 2, 'And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him: and the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan.' When his people are assaulted by Satan he hath most love for them, and taketh care beforehand: John xiii. 1, 'Having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them to the end.' Saith Christ of them, Poor creatures! they are left to storms and tempests, and they are undone if I help them not.

[4.] Though he permit the temptation, yet he alloweth not a total victory, as he prayed that Peter might not utterly forsake the faith. *Non pugna sublata est, sed victoria.* He doth not hinder the fight, but the victory. He overcame the devil and the world, therefore fear not. God promiseth help for human frailty, not for rashness and sloth. We are sure of victory whilst we resist and keep up the fight: James iv. 7, 'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.'

[5.] Being kept from the evil is better than to be exempted from the trouble of vexatious temptations. Our Lord prayeth so: John xvii. 15, 'I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.' He teacheth us to pray so: Mat. vi. 13, 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.' There is a direct prayer, and a prayer by way of reserve. First, if it be the will of God, 'lead us not into temptation;' but if that be, then 'keep us from the evil.' It is a more wonderful providence to be kept from the evil than to be kept from temptation. A garrison never assaulted is easily kept. And partly because the evil of sin is greater than the evil of trouble. Sin separateth from God, affliction driveth us to him; and to be preserved from the reign of sin is better than not to be permitted to fall into a signal act of sin; for the act may be consistent with grace, but not the reign.

Use 1. Let us not be secure. Christ was tempted, so was Job, so was Paul. We have a fierce and subtle adversary to encounter with, many trials we must look for. None are so tempted as the best christians; the pirate doth not set upon an empty vessel. Wicked men are not troubled; they are already in the snares, slaves and vassals to Satan, of whom he is sure already: Luke xi. 21, 'Where a strong man keeps his palace, his goods are in peace.' A middle sort of men God permitteth not to be tempted: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'God will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able.' They are not seasoned

enough, nor furnished with life and light. Satan's malice aimeth at the best, but he prevaieth with the presumptuously confident and fool-hardy. They know not their own weaknesses. If we slight these things, and thrust ourselves into temptations, we fall as a ready prey into the mouth of the roaring lion. You know how many a good purpose hath come to nothing; and will not you watch? This is the cause why we are so often surprised; we live and walk as if we were not among our enemies, as if the devil did not haunt us, and we gave him no occasion to solicit God against us.

2. Being forewarned, let us be forearmed or prepared against Satan's devices; otherwise, when we think, as Samson, to go forth and shake ourselves as at other times, we shall find that our strength is gone, and we have permitted ourselves too much to the power of the enemy. Our preparation mainly lieth in two things—

[1.] That we be dead to the flesh and the world. Be sober and watchful. Sobriety is a moderation in all earthly things. The devil usually gets the world on his side. Therefore, till we be dead to applause, commodity, honour, and profit, and resolve to be holy and obedient to God though it cost us dear, we shall do nothing in christianity. Satan will tempt the flesh, and that will soon say, Spare thyself: Mat. xvi. 22, 'This shall not be unto thee.' Therefore as long as there is a bias of worldly inclination upon us, and we are set on the pleasures, profits, or honours of the world, or be taken too much with its ease, peace, and prosperity, we are not prepared; and what work will Satan make when he comes to toss us!

[2.] Keep faith upright. Christ prays that Peter's faith may not fail, and 1 Peter v. 9, 'Whom resist, steadfast in the faith.' Faith has many things to pitch on, the whole gospel, but chiefly the promises and threatenings of the gospel; they will inform you what will be the end of godliness and sin, and a man that hath his eyes opened, and seeth the end of godliness and sin, hath a mighty advantage. As to the promises of Christ, surely Christ is no deceiver. Will you credit the devil, whom you have found to be false, and suspect the promises of Christ? Luke xii. 32, 'Fear not, little flock; for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' Christ promiseth more than the devil. As to the threatenings, let not the threatenings of men affright you; if they threaten a prison, God threateneth hell; if they threaten to molest the body, God can cast body and soul into hell. God can preserve you from what men threaten, and he threatens what is worse than man threatens; and therefore, to have our eyes in our head, and see the end of godliness and sin, is a mighty help in this case, that our faith may not fail.
