

SERMON UPON MATTHEW XV. 21-28.

Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs. And she saith, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table. And Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.—MAT. xv. 21-28.

WE come now to the second instance of a great and grown faith; this ought to be considered by us. In the centurion we had an instance of a reasoning faith, now of a wrestling faith—faith wrestling with grievous temptations, but at length obtaining help from God. We ought to consider this for these reasons—

1. Because Christ pronounceth it to be great faith, and so proper for our imitation, 'O woman, great is thy faith.' It is the faith of a woman; a woman not proselyted or embodied with the visible people of God at that time; a woman whose faith is approved and commended by Christ. And surely this should provoke every christian heart to be furnished with a like faith.

2. To instruct us that the life and exercise of faith is not easy, but will meet with great discouragements. We must reckon of trials, and prepare for them. They that leap into profession, and do not count the charges, will soon find their rash confidence disappointed. They may meet with rebukes from men. David's enemies said, 'There is no help for him in God,' Ps. iii. 2. Or from mistaking friends, as those that would not have Christ hindered in his passage: Mark x. 48, 'Many charged him that he should hold his peace; but he cried the more a great deal, Thou son of David, have mercy on me!' But this woman seemeth to be checked and disappointed by Christ himself, who at first answereth her not a word, and then seemingly defeateth her

confidence. To wrestle, not only with temporal discouragements, but disappointments of our hope in God, is the sorest trial. The blind man wrestled with the rebukes of men, but she with the rebukes of Christ himself. Yea, here is trial upon trial; she is put back after a first and second address. Christ, as God, knew the strength of her faith at first, but yet he would exercise her faith to the uttermost; as in another miracle it is said, 'He himself knew what he would do, but this he said to prove him;' John vi. 6, 'Whence shall we buy bread, that so great a company may eat.' Christ loveth to try them with whom he hath to do, sometimes the weakness, sometimes the strength of their faith.

3. Because of the success: ver. 28, 'Be it unto thee even as thou wilt; and her daughter was made whole from that very hour.' When faith is sufficiently tried, Christ can hold out no longer. As Joseph's bowels yearned, and he could not refrain himself: Gen. xlv. 3, 'I am Joseph;' so when the strength of faith is sufficiently discovered, Christ cannot continue the conflict any longer; the believer shall have what he doth desire: Hosea xi. 8, 'Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together;' and Jer. xxxi. 20, 'Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him. I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.' So Isa. xl. 1, 2, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and say unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquities are pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.' Now it is enough; let them have their mercies and their comforts.

In opening this instance, let us consider—

1. The quality of the woman. She is called in Mat. xv. 22, 'a woman of Canaan;' in Mark vii. 26, 'a Greek,' a Syrophœnician by nation. Phœnicia was that country which was inhabited by the relics of the ancient Canaanites: she was by nation a Phœnician, and by religion a Greek; for the term of Jew and Greek distinguished the then world: Rom. i. 16, 'It is the power of God unto salvation, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek;' and it is as much as Jew and gentile. She was a devout woman among the gentiles, that, bordering upon the people of God, was acquainted with the true religion, though she professed it not.

2. That she was a believer appeareth by her coming to Christ to cure her daughter, who was bodily vexed with the devil. How she was acquainted with Christ, it is said, Mark vii. 25, 'She heard of him;' that is, by the rumour of his miracles. And if God blessed rumours, or the fame of Christ's miracles, we may be ashamed that we do no more improve a clear word. And not by her coming only, but also by the title she gave to Christ; her calling him, 'The Son of David,' ver. 22. This was the solemn name of the true promised Messiah. So the blind men, Mat. xx. 30, 'Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.' So Bartimeus (if it be a distinct story), Mark x. 47, 'Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.' 'Son of David' was the common title by which our Saviour was called and known among the Jews: Mat. ix. 27, 'Thou Son of David, have mercy on us;' because Christ was

to be born of the seed and posterity of David: Jer. xxiii. 5, 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise up unto David a righteous branch;' Rom. i. 3, 'Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.' The Messiah was to come as a king, to rule and feed his church, and therefore he is called sometimes 'David' in the prophets; and in the days of his flesh, in the addresses that were made to him, 'Son of David.' So that in this she showeth her faith. There is in faith knowledge, assent, and affiance, and all three are in this woman's faith. That the Messiah was to be the Son of David, there is her knowledge. There was her assent, that Jesus was the Christ or true Messiah, for she applieth the title to him upon the rumours of his miracles. Then there was her affiance and dependence in this address to him, as one that was able and willing to help all distressed creatures; and that she renewed her suit after so many repulses showed a notable confidence in his mercy and power.

3. The greatness and strength of her faith. To set forth that we must consider—(1.) Her trials and temptations; (2.) Her victory over them, by her importunity, humility, and resolved confidence.

First, Her temptations; they are four—

1. Christ's silence, 'He answered her not a word,' ver. 23.

2. The coldness of the disciples' dealing in her behalf, in the same verse, 'His disciples besought him, Send her away, for she crieth after us.'

3. Christ's answer to his disciples, seeming to exclude her out of his commission, ver. 24, 'He answered and said, I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'

4. Her renewed importunity draweth another answer from Christ, which implieth a contempt of her, or at least a strong reason against her, ver. 26, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it unto dogs.' So that you see here are sore trials, multiplied trials; but yet she keepeth begging and arguing with Christ till he giveth her satisfaction.

First, Christ's silence: ver. 23, 'And he answered her not a word.' It is a great trial to our faith, but such as the people of God usually meet withal. It is sad to go to a dumb oracle, and get not a word from God; so here. What! not a word from a merciful and gracious Saviour, who was so ready to hear and help upon all occasions, and to cure all those that came to him! But she gets not a word, though her daughter was grievously tormented by the devil; a notable temptation to a poor woman, who had heard so much of Christ's power and compassion towards all those that came to him for relief. He heard well enough what she asked, but not a word of answer gets she from him. I will show you, that though Christ love our persons, and dislikes not our petitions, but meaneth to grant them, yet for a time he will seem to take no notice of them.

1. That this is a sore temptation.

2. That it should not yet weaken our faith.

1. That it is a sore temptation appeareth by the complaints of the saints and servants of God: Lam. iii. 8, 'When I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer;' as if God had locked up himself, that their

prayers should not come at him, or find access to him. So ver. 44, 'Thou coverest thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through;' as if God had wrapped up himself in a thick cloud of displeasure against our sins, that our prayers could find no entrance. So the spouse: Cant. v. 6, 'I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.' That God should refuse and reject our prayers is a grievous trial to the faithful, who value communion with God. Nay, this delay may be so long till the cause seem hopeless: Ps. lxxix. 3, 'I am weary of my crying; my throat is dried, mine eyes fail, while I wait for my God.' So Ps. xxii. 2, 'O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.' And all this while God seemeth to forsake them, nor to regard the suit, as if he had no respect to their hard condition. To lose our labour in prayer is one of the saddest disappointments that we can meet with, when our loud and importunate cries bring no relief to us. But—

2. It should not weaken our faith; for God's delay is for his own glory and our good.

[1.] For his own glory and the beauty of his providence. We read, John xi. 5, 6, 'Jesus loved Martha, and her sister and Lazarus; and when he heard he was sick' (even to death), 'he abode still two days in the same place where he was.' There is little love in that, you will think, to a sick friend who was ready to die. Martha expostulateth with him about it, ver. 21, 'Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.' But Christ giveth the true account of it, ver. 40, 'Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe thou shouldst see the glory of God.' It was more for the glory of God to raise a dead man than to cure a sick man. So when the disciples were in a storm, Christ made a show of passing by: Mark vi. 48, 'He cometh unto them, walking on the sea-side, and would have passed by them.' So Christ delayeth the woman as to appearance, and denieth her, that the glory and greatness of her faith might be more seen. *Ἰνα στεφανώσῃ τὴν γυναῖκα*, saith Chrysostom, that he might crown the woman as a notable believer.

[2.] For our good, and to exercise our faith, patience, love, and desire.

(1.) Our faith, to wait and depend upon God for things we see not; for faith is a dependence upon God for something that lieth out of sight. This woman was delayed, but had at last that which she desired; but first her great faith was discovered.

(2.) Our patience in tarrying God's leisure. His dearest children are not admitted at the first knock. David saith in three verses, 'I cried, I cried, I cried,' Ps. cxix. 145-147. Our Lord Jesus prayed thrice before he got any comfort in his agony: Mat. xxvi. 44, 'And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time; and then an angel appeared to him from heaven, and strengthened him,' Luke xxii. 43. Elijah prayed thrice for the dead child ere he got him to life: 1 Kings xvii. 21, 'And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee let this child's soul return unto him again.' Paul prayed thrice: 2 Cor. xii. 8, 'For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.' The Lord useth the like dispensation to

us that are their followers: Heb. vi. 12, 'Be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.' We are told, Lam. iii. 26, 'It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.' It is *bonum bonestum et utile*. It is our duty, and it is our profit. Our times are always present with us. Hungry stomachs must have the meat ere it be sodden or roasted. We would have our mercies too soon, like the foolish husbandman who would reap his corn and get it into the barn before it be ripened.

(3.) Our love; though we be not feasted with felt comforts and present delights, or bribed with a sensible dispensation, or indulged with a ready condescension to our requests. God will try the deportment of his children, whether we love him or his benefits most; whether sensible consolations, especially external, be more to us than a God in covenant: Isa. xxvi. 8, 'Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee.' A child of God will love him for his judgments and fear him for his mercies. God will try whether we can rejoice in himself in our greatest wants and destitutions: Hab. iii. 17, 18, 'Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.' A resolute dependence on an unseen God is the power and glory of faith, and a resolute adherence to a withdrawn God is the vigour of love. Lime, the more water you sprinkle upon it, the more it burneth. 'Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it,' Cant. viii. 7.

(4.) To enlarge our desires, and put greater fervency into them. A sack that is stretched out holds the more. Delay increaseth importunity: Mat. vii. 7, 'Ask, seek, knock;' the door is kept bolted that we may knock the harder. The choicest mercies come to us after great wrestlings. She prayeth, but Christ keepeth silence. Silence is an answer, and speaketh thus much, Pray on, and continue your praying still. Though Christ loved the supplicant, and meaneth to grant the petition, yet at first he answereth her not a word.

Secondly, Her next temptation was from the small assistance she had from the disciples: ver. 23, 'Send her away, for she crieth after us.' Interpreters dispute whether this was spoken out of commiseration or impatience. I incline to the former, and the sense is, 'Send her away by granting her request; do that for her which she desireth, that she may be quiet.' But though it were commiseration, yet they spake too coldly as to her distress, and seem to have a greater respect to their own trouble than the woman's affliction, that they might not be troubled with her cries, but they desire for quietness' sake that she might be despatched one way or another. Many a poor benighted soul pray themselves, and set others on praying, till they are weary, and God heareth not, which is a great discouragement to a poor afflicted creature; but yet it is but a temptation; for though man's drop be soon spent, yet God's ocean of compassions faileth not. When they are troubled, yet importunity is welcome to Christ.

Thirdly, Her next temptation is sorer. Christ seemeth to exclude her out of his commission: ver. 24, 'But he answered and said, I am

not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' This was a truth, for Christ in the days of his flesh was a minister of the circumcision, Rom. xv. 8. His personal and particular ministry was principally designed for the people of the Jews; they were to have the morning market of the gospel, and the first handsel of the Redeemer's grace; which, by the way, was a rebuke to the Jews that they did no more prize his ministry and dispensation when this stranger was so importunate to receive the benefit of it. But, however, it was a great trial to the woman, as if she were not one of these lost sheep whom Christ came to seek. When salvation itself refuseth to save us, when Christ shall in effect say, I am a Saviour, but not unto thee; thou art not one of my redeemed ones: this is an amazing thing. Poor believers, when they are in this conflict, seem to be driven from Christ, not only by their own misgiving hearts, but the denunciation of his word: they question their election and the intention of God's grace, whether ever it were meant to them or no. But this is but a temptation; we must not betray our duties by our scruples; though it be midnight now, we cannot say it will never be day. Our rule, which we must stick to in such cases, is, God may do what he pleaseth. I must do what he commandeth. Our necessities are great, and so are Christ's compassions; therefore a believing soul must not be put off by groundless fears, nor must the threatenings of the word drive us from, but to the promise; for God opposeth for a while that he may at length give faith the victory.

Fourthly, when the woman reneweth her suit: ver. 25, 'Then she came, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.' Yet ver. 26, 'He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs.' By implication Christ reckoneth her among the dogs; a grievous word to drop from the mouth of a gracious Saviour. But when Christ trieth us, he will try us to the quick, and humble us to the very dust. Our Lord speaketh this according to the common rate of language among the Jews, who accounted all the heathens as dogs, and without the covenant. Such as were within the covenant and pale of grace were holy and consecrated to God; others who were without the covenant, because of their false religion, were accounted profane and unclean. Dogs and sheep were opposed one to another. The people of Israel are deciphered by the appellation of 'lost sheep;' others are called 'dogs;' Rev. xxii. 15, 'Without are dogs,' a term applied to this day by all oriental people to those whom they count to be misbelievers. Surely one would think now here were an end of her faith and address to Christ. No; the humble soul maketh an advantage of this: ver. 27, 'Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.' Faith is quick to observe all advantages whereby it may strengthen itself. A dog is allowed to creep under the children's table, and to feed on what falls down there. Thus she maketh a seeming rebuke to be a kind of claim and title. And then Christ can hold out no longer, for he will at length yield, and will not always hide himself from the seeking soul. They that wrestle will at length overcome: Mark vii. 29, 'And he said unto her, For this saying, Go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter.'

Secondly, Her victory over these temptations. (1.) By her importu-

nity: (2.) Her humility; (3.) Her resolved confidence; all which are the fruits of great faith.

1. Her importunity. She will not be beaten off by Christ's silence; but she maketh some advantage of it; for it is not said, he 'heard her not a word,' but 'answered her not a word.' Christ may hear his people when he doth not presently answer them. She seemed to be excluded out of Christ's commission, but neither this nor reproach of her own condition doth hinder the exercise of her faith, but still she reneweth her suit, 'Lord, have mercy on me; Son of David, help me.' The woman will not be put off praying when Christ seemeth to forbid or not to regard her praying. Her daughter was sore vexed, and she must have help from Christ or none. The more God seemeth to refuse us, the more instant should we be in prayer, and pursue our suit constantly. Let God answer how he pleaseth; if he be silent, we must resolve to follow the suit till we get audience; if he seem to deny, we must get ground by denials; if he rebuke us, we must still make supplications. Be it a suspension, a seeming denial, a contrary providence, faith will not give over. To sink under the burden argueth weakness, but it is strength of faith to wrestle through it. We read of Pherecides, a Grecian, in a naval fight between his nation and Xerxes, that he held a boat in which the Persians were fighting, first with his right arm, when that was cut off with his left, when that was cut off with his teeth, and would not let go his holdfast but with his life. This doth somewhat represent an importunate soul. This woman, when Christ doth seem to turn away from her and refuse her prayer, yet she prayeth, 'Lord, help me.' When he reasoneth from his charge, yet still she will come and worship him. When he putteth her off with the common reproach which the Jews did cast upon all that were not of their religion, his doctrines and miracles were children's bread, she turneth a discouragement into an argument, and maketh her claim, 'The dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table.' Thus all true believers are in good earnest; come what will of it, they are resolved to pray still. Thus blind Bartimeus, the more they rebuked him, the more he cried, Mark x. 48. Faith is like fire, the more it is pent up, the more it striveth to break out, and worketh effectually in us. We read of Jacob's wrestling with God: Gen. xxii. 24, 'There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.' And it is explained, Hosea xii. 3, 4, 'He had power with God; yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplications to him.' Wrestling souls that are good at holding and drawing with the Almighty will not let him go till he bless them. The woman doth not turn her back upon Christ, but draws the nearer to him the more he seemeth to drive her away from him, and keepeth arguing with him, and beseeching of him, till he giveth her satisfaction.

But how shall we do to keep up prayer in the midst of so many discouragements? *Ans.* (1.) Our necessity should quicken us; and (2.) God's goodness and power should support us. Faith pressed with need is earnest in prayer, when it is dealing with a God gracious and powerful; why should we give over the suit?

2. Her humility. We read of no murmuring and impatience or discontent at Christ's carriage. No; if we will wrestle with God, we must

wrestle with prayers and tears, with humble and broken hearts; there must be no complaining of God, but to God. The woman doth not tax Christ as harsh and severe, but only maketh supplication, 'Lord, have mercy upon me; Son of David, help me.' It is said, Mat. xv. 25, 'She worshipped him.' But in Mark. vii. 25, it is said, 'She fell at his feet.' She fell prostrate before him, and owneth the term of 'dog,' that justly she might be accounted so, and maketh it her plea and claim. Humility is contented to be humbled as deeply as the Lord pleaseth, but cannot bear this, to be excluded from Christ and the benefit of his grace. In all faith there is always a deep humility. When Christ rebuketh her as a dog, she doth not make a murmuring retort, but an humble plea, that some of the mercy provided for Israel might be spared to a poor Canaanite, a crumb at least.

3. A resolved faith under our greatest pressures: Job. xv. 14, 'Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him.' As Antisthenes told his master that taught him philosophy, that he should not find a club big enough to beat him from him. Faith will not quit its adherence to God for any difficulty whatsoever; when God seemeth to quit the believer, the believer will not quit God, but take him as a friend when he seemeth to deal as an enemy, and still put a good construction upon his providence. This resolute adherence is seen in three things—

[1.] An adherence to his way, how little soever he seemeth to own it: Ps. xlv. 17, 18, 'All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant: our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way.' Sharp afflictions do not discharge us from our duty in professing the truth; as our steps must not decline, so not our hearts: Dan. iii. 17, 18, 'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king; but if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.' However God disposes of us, we must keep to our duty.

[2.] In perseverance in the use of means: Rom. xii. 12, 'Continuing instant in prayer.' We are to use the duty still, though we have no satisfaction as to the event, and as long as there is life in the duty, it will come to something at the last: Luke v. 15, 'We have toiled all night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless, at thy word we will let down the net.' It is enough that these means are appointed by God, and we must use them, though hitherto we have gained little comfort and success by them.

[3.] In a dependence upon his promises and powerful providence. The woman sticketh to Christ as only able to help her, though there was little appearance of any help from him. She runneth not away to another helper, but worshippeth him, cleaveth to him. Better lie dead at Christ's feet than die in a state of alienation from him. We must resolve to be his, though we cannot know that he is ours. No trouble, how great soever, is a warrant to quit our trust; and whatever disappointment saith to us, it doth not say, put your confidence elsewhere, or trust no longer in God. This resolute confidence is justifiable upon these grounds.

(1.) His providence will never give his word the lie. Let God do

what he will, they are approved who are approved by his word, and they are condemned who are condemned by his word: Ps. lxxiii. 17, 'When I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end;' Job. iii. 3, 'I have seen the foolish taking root; but suddenly I cursed his habitation.' And, on the contrary, Ps. iv. 3, 'But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself; the Lord will hear when I call unto him;' Isa. iii. 10, 'Say ye to the righteous that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat of the fruit of their doings.'

(2.) There is more good-will in his heart than is visible in his dealings. The merciful nature of God should be a support to us, though we see nothing of the effects of it in his providence: Job. x. 13, 'These things hast thou hid in thine heart; I know that it is with thee.' He speaketh of his favourable inclination to show pity to distressed creatures. We are not able always to reconcile his present dispensations with his gracious nature yet faith must not quit its holdfast. We must see what is hid in God's heart, and comfort ourselves with that favour and mercy which we know to be essential to him. Though the mercy and pity be not visible and obvious to sense, the disposition and inclination abideth in God unchangeable and sure. God is a merciful God still, and Christ a compassionate Saviour, though the effects be suspended to try and sharpen our faith.

(3.) Because God loveth to bring light out of darkness, to give the valley of Achor for a door of hope to 'bring meat out of the eater, and sweetness out of the strong,' to bring about his people's mercies by means very improbable and contrary, that he may train us up to hope against hope. When deliverance is a-coming, it is not always in sight. Christ at a wedding calls for water when he intended to give wine: John ii. 7, and here he rebuketh the woman as a dog when he meant to treat her as a daughter of Abraham.

(4.) When he seemeth to resist and be opposite to his people, he giveth them secret strength to prevail over him. When Jacob wrestled with God, it was by God's own strength; God in Jacob seemed to overcome God without him, or against him. Was not the spirit of Christ at work in the heart of this woman all the while he seemed to be struggling with her? He never striveth with his servants but he giveth them suitable strength to the task he imposeth on them: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able: but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it;' Ps. cxxxviii. 3, 'In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.' He heareth not as to deliverance, but yet he heareth as to support.

(5.) Because the saints are wont to train up themselves for these difficulties, by proposing hard cases to themselves; as Ps. iii. 6, 'I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about;' Ps. xxvii. 3, 'Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident;' Ps. xli. 1, 2, 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.' Therefore will we not fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains

be carried into the midst of the sea.' Presumption is a coward, and a runaway from all thoughts of danger; but faith meeteth its enemy in open field; it supposeth the worst, that the heart may be fortified aforehand against whatever may fall out. They much inure their thoughts to God, and dwell in and with the Almighty, and reckon upon the changes of a reeling world, and so are prepared to be martyrs, and suffer the worst for God.

Use. You have heard this faith opened to you; labour to get such a wrestling faith in expecting the benefits of the Messiah. You may have your difficulties—

1. About your spiritual estate and acceptance with God in Christ. You would have the devil cast out of your souls: you beg it of God, but he seemeth not to hear you; you are to wait, not to give over the matter as hopeless, and in despondency to throw up all at first: 'The Lord is righteous, for I have rebelled against his commandment,' Lam. i. 18. He hath called, and you would not hear, and therefore now God may delay. It may be you have doubts whether ever God will hear you, and you question your election; then consider God's mercy and your necessity. Christ hath taught us how to pray for the spirit: Luke xi. 8, 'Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him.' You continue praying, and it is with you as before; it may be worse: Rom. vii. 9, 'But when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' A bullock is most unruly at first yoking; fire at first kindling casteth forth much smoke. What then? Should you give over seeking to Christ? That is to shut the door upon yourselves. God seemeth to shut you out, and you are discouraged with a deep sense of your own unworthiness. Will he look upon such a dead dog as I am? In such cases you should creep in at the back door of the promise, as Paul doth: 1 Tim. i. 15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.' If Christ came to save sinners, I am sinner enough for Christ to save, or, as the woman here, 'dogs lick up the crumbs.'

2. In some prevailing carnal distempers, that you have long wrestled with to get rid of, and you desire the physician of souls should cure you. Follow the means, lay open before him the plague and sore of your own heart. You do not presently find success; will you therefore give over the business as hopeless, and go still with a wound or thorn in your conscience? No; consider—(1.) It must be cured; (2.) If ever it be cured, it must be by Christ; (3.) Use all his healing methods; (4.) And beg a blessing upon all by prayer, 'Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,' Mat. viii. 2; (5.) Believe his grace to be sufficient for thee. Be earnest and importunate; we scratch the face of sin, but we do not seek to root it out. If you are resolved, you will take no nay. In a little time, and after some serious wrestling with God, you will be eminent in the contrary grace.

3. In great straits and pressures you seek to God; plead his covenant, and yet no answer cometh. Will you turn atheist, and say, It is in vain to pray to God? No; 'He that believeth will not make haste,' Isa. xxviii. 16. Or will you faint and give over the suit? Where then is the exercise of your faith and patience? It may be

God showeth himself strange to you in your troubles ; as Jonah ii. 4, 'I said, I am cast out of thy sight, yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.' Let faith look to heaven and the covenant made with Christ. Will you give way to the temptation till you are bribed by sense ? No ; look again and again. Let faith triumph over difficulties, and the issue will be comfortable.

4. For the church, as God's children prefer Zion above their chief joy. You pray for the welfare of it, and God giveth no comfortable answer ; what then ? Will you neglect your duty or abate of your love ? It may be the clouds are thickened, dangers greater. What ! will you swell against providence ? Hab. ii. 4, 'Behold his soul, which is lifted up, is not upright in him ; but the just shall live by his faith.' No ; it is importunity, humility, resolved confidence will do you good at the last ; follow the suit still, and say, 'For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth,' Isa. lxii. 1. There should be an unwearied solicitation of God for the church's restitution. Christ is the church's advocate, we are her solicitors. This is an example, not to gaze upon, but to imitate.
