

SERMON UPON ACTS VII. 55, 56.

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.—Acts vii. 55, 56.

THESE words show the carriage of Stephen when the Jewish fury was whetted against him. We read of some, Acts ii. 37, that were pricked in heart when they were charged with crucifying the Messiah; but these, when they are charged by Stephen with the same crime, are cut at heart, ver. 54. This is not so kindly a work as that; that pierced their spirits with sorrow, this embittered and inflamed them into wrath and rage; they were cut at heart, and gnashed on him with their teeth. Stephen, by that discerning they were resolved upon his death, what doth he do? Expect to be defended and rescued by the christians? There were none such in the council; and for other, their religion warranted not violence against the magistrate. What then? Being forsaken of all, he lifteth up his eyes to heaven to the Lord Jesus, whose cause he pleaded, and for whose sake he incurred this hazard and danger, 'But he,' &c.

In the words we have two things—(1.) His vision; (2.) The publication of it.

First, His vision; there three things are observable—

(1.) The inward impulsive cause, 'Being full of the Holy Ghost.' (2.) The action consequent thereupon, 'He looked up to heaven.' (3.) The event; where—(1st.) The act, 'He saw.' (2d.) The objects, or things seen by him, 'The glory of God, and Jesus standing at his right hand.'

1. The inward moving cause or power by which he was moved and assisted, 'Being full of the Holy Ghost.' It is said before, Acts vi. 5, that Stephen was a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. That expresseth the habit, which was now excited and quickened into act; his faith and confidence in God was heightened into courage; as a good soldier hath always an habit of fortitude, but in the danger of battle his valour is quickened, and a great ardour cometh upon him. So holy men, that have always a spirit of faith, upon necessary occasions are elevated beyond the line of their ordinary strength; as Stephen was here by a new impulse of the Holy Ghost. This is notable, that

it is a special work of the Spirit of God to raise our minds to the sight of heavenly things: 2 Cor. i. 22, 'Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts;' Rom. viii. 23, 'Ourselves also which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, viz., the redemption of our body.' All the lively effectual knowledge of any truth cometh from him, especially a sight of heaven; it is his office to make all our knowledge of truth more quick, lively, and powerful, to affect the heart and rule the life. And especially is the Spirit given as the earnest and first-fruits of heaven.

2. The action on Stephen's part; he looketh up steadfastly into heaven. All earthly help failing, he looketh higher; turneth off his eyes from the world and men to God, the great arbiter and disposer of life and death. We read of Moses, ἀπέβλεπε εἰς μισθαποδοσίαν, Heb. xi. 26, a looking off and a looking on. The word signifieth a turning of the eye from one object to behold another. He turned away his mind and heart from the honours, pleasures, and treasures of Egypt, and fixed them on the rewards of godliness. The more we shut the eye of sense, the better we shall open that of faith. If we did oftener look from that which is present to that which is to come, from the creature to God, from earth to heaven, we should be much wiser and stronger than we are, and not so regard our worldly concernments as that upon every rumour of danger our hearts should be shaken like the leaves of the trees of the wood.

3. The event; he 'saw the glory of God, and Jesus Christ standing at his right hand.' And in his publication of his vision, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened.' Now here three difficulties are to be considered—

[1.] The opening of the heavens, how such a solid body should be divided, and yet close and come together again.

[2.] The seeing of God, who is invisible: John i. 18, 'No man hath seen God at any time;' and 1 Tim. vi. 16, 'He dwelleth in light, which no mortal eye can approach unto and live.'

[3.] The seeing Christ at so great a distance. How can a mortal eye reach so far through the house in which the council was met, the intervening clouds and firmament? These difficulties we must remove before we go further. To solve these doubts there are many opinions.

(1.) Some make it a mere intellectual vision, or the sight of faith. He was so firmly persuaded of the truth of these things, as if he had seen them with bodily eyes. So Abraham saw Christ's day, John viii. 56.

(2.) A prophetic vision, such as the prophets had by the immediate instinct and operation of God. So Isaiah saw God on the throne, Isa. vi. 1. Paul was rapt into the third heaven, whether in the body or out of the body he could not tell, 2 Cor. xii. Most of the visions the prophets had were of this nature: 1 Kings xxii. 19, 'I saw the Lord sitting on his throne,' said Micaiah. A vision, as distinguished from a dream, was an immediate representation of things, either to the imagination, or to the understanding of a man while he awoke. Certainly this was one means whereby God did manifest himself to the prophets. If to their imagination, then he did affect their minds and hearts with certain sensible objects and species. If to their understanding, by cer-

tain ideas and representations, as did wonderfully ravish and transport them.

(3.) Others, a symbolical vision, that he saw these things by certain external shapes and corporeal images: as John Baptist saw the Spirit descending like a dove on Christ, John i. 32. So Moses is said to see God, Exod. xxiv. 11, as he saw some visible signs of his glorious presence. The rays of his majesty have been seen by creatures.

(4.) Others think his natural eye was so strengthened as to be able to pierce the clouds and see God's throne, and Christ at his right hand. Such a sight the blessed have hereafter: John xvii. 24, 'I will that they may be with me, that they may behold my glory.' And they think, by extraordinary dispensation, this was vouchsafed to Stephen; that he had such a supernatural light as to see heaven opened, and the splendour and majesty of God, and Christ at his right hand; in short, a glimpse of the beatifical vision.

Now which of these shall we choose for the opening of these words? The sight of faith cannot be denied; but withal it must be granted that it was accompanied with a glorious apparition and spiritual ecstasy; which if any will call a glimpse of the beatifical vision, there is nothing absurd in it; for it is said, 'His face shone like an angel,' Acts vi. 15; that is, there was a great splendour about him. And God, that wrought such a change in his body, might exhibit such a manifestation of himself to his mind as might come near to the beatifical vision.

But let us come more particularly to the difficulties alleged.

(1st.) The opening of heaven implieth not a change in the nature of heaven, or rupture there; for it was only seen of Stephen, not by his enemies. The miracle was not in heaven, but in his eye. A miraculous vision it was, or some remarkable manner of appearance. We read, the heavens were opened at Christ's baptism, Mat. iii. 16. But interpreters are at a stand whether they were really parted asunder, or only after some remarkable manner of appearance. So again, that the heavens were opened in Peter's trance, Acts x. 11. And that is granted by all that it was done in a vision. And why may not the like be supposed here?

(2d.) The second difficulty is about the sight of God. Certainly no man can see God in his essence; for he is a spirit, and a spirit cannot be seen with bodily eyes. Nor can he be seen in the infinite excellency of his majesty; for what is finite cannot comprehend what is infinite. But he may be seen in such a visible manifestation of his glory as he is pleased to represent to the view of the creature, both here and hereafter. Thus here he may and hath often been seen. Therefore when it is said, 'He saw the glory of God,' you must understand so far as he can be seen by an human eye; namely, by certain strictures and rays of his splendour and majesty, or such a brightness by which his divine glory is represented unto us. So Luke ii. 9, 'The angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them;' that is, the splendour occasioned by the presence of an angel. So in the apparition of an angel to Peter in prison: Acts xii. 7, 'The angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison.' So by this manifestation which God made of himself to Stephen, thereby is represented a glorious majesty, such as is described Exod. xxiv. 17,

‘The sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire in the eyes of the children of Israel;’ meaning thereby some representation of his splendour and majesty; only that was more for terror, this for comfort and support.

(3*d.*) For the third difficulty, about the seeing of Christ, this being an extraordinary miraculous vision, it hath been answered before. But mark, ‘He saw Christ standing at his right hand.’ Elsewhere he is described in another posture, of ‘sitting on the right hand of God:’ as Mark xvi. 14, ‘He was received into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.’ That noteth his royal dignity; but standing as ready for the help of all that belong to him. God is said to arise when he will help his people; as Ps. lxxviii. 1, ‘Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered.’ So he saw Jesus, God-man, standing, as in a posture of readiness to assist and help his servant.

Nothing remaineth for further explaining this text but the publication of his vision: ‘And he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.’ This publication is made—

[1.] To show his own faith. The apostle saith, 2 Cor. iv. 13, ‘We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I have believed, therefore have I spoken: we also believe, and therefore speak;’ that is, we having the same spirit of faith which is spoken of in David’s psalms, where he saith, ‘I believed, therefore I spake.’ In sore afflictions he pleads the hopes of his preservation and deliverance. Therefore we profess Christ, and express our faith in him, notwithstanding all our afflictions, troubles, and dangers. A spirit of faith, when it cometh upon a man, it cannot be checked; but a bashful inconfidence is easily obstructed. Therefore Stephen would not conceal his vision to himself, but divulge it for the profit of others.

[2.] To show forth the dignity of his lord and master. Therefore he calleth him the Son of man, but acknowledgeth him to be at the right hand of God; to show that Christ reigneth as God incarnate in that flesh in which he was abased and contemptuously used by men: ‘Crucified in the flesh, but liveth by the power of God,’ 2 Cor. xiii. 4.

[3.] He testifieth and publisheth it to show them that they did in vain strive against the truth of Christ, whom they supposed to be utterly destroyed by their rulers; for he was in the highest glory, reigning with God in the heavens. Therefore nothing more vain and fruitless than the opposition which Satan and his agents make against Christ and his kingdom: ‘For he is sat down at the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till all his enemies be made his footstool,’ Heb. x. 12, 13.

Doct. Nothing doth fortify us against the discouragements we meet with in Christ’s service so much as the sight of heaven, and Christ’s sitting at the right hand of God there.

In the prosecution of this point I shall consider—(1.) The objects represented, God, Christ, and heaven; (2.) The sight of them, how we can see such things, visions and raptures being antiquated things, at least not commonly dispensed; then (3.) You will soon see how this is the ground of christian courage.

First, The objects represented to us, God, Christ, heaven.

1. There is mentioned in the text the glory of God. A due sight of

God lesseneth all other things in our opinion and estimation of them and affection to them ; and could we but see his glory, we might easily wink out the amiableness and terribleness of the creature ; for what are all the fears of man and the rage of the world to God ? the wrath of a poor creature, whose breath is in his nostrils, against the power of an eternal God ? Ps. xl. 4, ' Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, and such as turn aside to lies.' The proud are those that abuse their prosperity to the oppression of others, and, turning aside to lies, seek to uphold themselves by earthly props and dependences, or those base arts by which atheistical men, that have no conscience, would maintain their greatness. Surely he that is afraid of man doth not rightly know God : Isa. li. 12, 13, ' Who art thou that art afraid of a man that shall die, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker.' Is not God able to bear us out in his work ? Heb. xi. 27, Moses endured the wrath of the king, seeing him that is invisible. Could we get this sight of his invisible glory, lesser things would not startle us. Alas ! when we come to set God against man, the match is altogether unequal ; there is then the Creator against the creature, who is the mere product of his Maker's will, and can subsist and act no longer than he pleaseth ; an eternal God against a bubble, that is soon blown up, and bursts. You may set his wisdom against their policy and wiles : ' For there is no wisdom, nor counsel, nor understanding, against the Lord,' Prov. xxi. 30. His love and goodness against their malice and cruelty. What matter is it if they frown when he smileth ? His power against their weakness ; they can be nothing without him, and therefore we need not fear the sword if we have not reason to fear him that beareth the sword. And lastly, his promises against their threatenings ; he is not God if he be not above his creature. All the powers of the world are nothing to God.

2. The next object is Jesus Christ at his right hand. This is the second object in the text. Let us a little consider what this importeth. Properly speaking, God hath neither right hand nor left, for he is a spirit. It is a metaphor, therefore, which must be explained by the manner of earthly kings, who place those whom they highly esteem and honour on their right hand ; as Solomon did his mother in a chair of state on his right hand, 2 Kings ii. 19 ; and also such whom they put in chief authority and trust next themselves, as the mother of Zebedee's children made suit to Christ that her two sons might sit, one at the right hand, the other at the left of Christ in his kingdom, Mat. xx. 21. She falsely imagined it to be an earthly kingdom, accompanied with worldly honour ; and therefore the purport of her request was, that her two sons might have the highest places of authority and profit under Christ, and next to Christ in his kingdom. So Christ's sitting at the right hand of God noteth the esteem he hath with God, and his being exalted to the highest degree of glory, and majesty, and authority, and honour, next himself. First, let us see the things imported by it ; secondly, the ends of it.

[1.] The things imported by it.

(1.) His great esteem with God, which is a ground of confidence ; for we have a friend in heaven, as David had Jonathan in Saul's court, to give him notice of danger, and to prevent displeasure from breaking

out against him. Surely to have a friend in the court of heaven is a great privilege; one who taketh up all differences between God and us, and answereth all accusations of Satan and his instruments, and preventeth wrath from breaking out upon us: 1 John ii. 1, 'If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' We should not abuse it to wantonness and wilful sinning: yet it is a comfort against failings, and also against the clamours and reproaches of the world, that we have an advocate and witness on high: 'My witness is in heaven,' saith Job.

(2.) The glory and majesty which is put upon him, next to God, more than any creature is capable of, by virtue of the unspeakable union between the two natures. Crowned with glory and honour. He hath the fulness of grace and glory given to him, to dispense to his redeemed ones, Acts v. 31, which is a great comfort, to consider his personal endowments as God incarnate.

(3.) The authority and power that is put upon him. It is said, 1 Peter iii. 22, that 'he is gone into the heavens, and is on the right hand of God; angels, authorities, and powers being made subject to him;' so that he hath the highest glory, the highest power. And Eph. i. 20, 21, 'God hath set him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in the world to come;' that is, not only above earthly potentates, who are his vicegerents, but heavenly powers, who are his messengers and instruments, whom he employeth for the defence and comfort of the godly: Heb. i. 14, 'Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?' and for the terror and punishment of his enemies; Ps. lxxviii. 17, 'The chariots of the Lord are seventy thousand, even thousands of angels. The Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.' Mark there, thousands of angels are but as his chariot conveying him from heaven to earth. And mark, 'The Lord is among them;' that is, God incarnate; for he presently speaketh of his ascending up on high, and leading captivity captive, ver. 18. And among them in his holy place; that is, in heaven. As at the giving of the law in mount Sinai, there were then, so they still attend on the propagation of the gospel. Now this is a great comfort to the godly when they are oppressed; especially when the authorities and powers of the earth are employed against them, as they were in the apostles' time. So that we cannot utterly fail while Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

[2.] The ends for which Christ was exalted to sit at the right hand of God are, to perform the several functions of his mediatorial office; therefore in such high esteem, such majesty, such authority. His offices are three—his prophetic, sacerdotal, and regal office; which he doth by three solemn acts—

(1.) The effusion of his Spirit, to promote the ends of his prophetic office, convincing the world of the truth of his doctrine, and converting them by it. Therefore the first news we hear of Christ after his ascension, as soon as he was warm in the mediatorial throne, was his pouring out the Spirit, Acts ii. And presently the virtue of it appeared; three thousand souls were added to the church that day. And this is a pledge of what is continually dispensed. There is still a Spirit sent forth, to

convince the unbelieving world, and to conquer the opposing wisdom and power of the flesh, John xvi. 8; as also to beget and continue life in his people, that they may be actually put in possession of what he hath purchased for them; for he hath promised to accompany the dispensation of the gospel with this Spirit to the end of the world: Mat. xxviii. 20, 'I am with you.' Not only by his powerful providence, but his convincing, supporting, quickening Spirit.

(2.) The second work Christ doth at the right hand of God belongeth to his priestly office; and that is his intercession: Rom. viii. 34, 'He sitteth at the right hand of God, making intercession for us.' As the high priest went into the holy place with blood, so Christ is gone to represent the merit of his sacrifice: Heb. ix. 24, 'Christ is entered into heaven, now to appear in the presence of God for us.' To answer the accusations of Satan, 1 John ii. 1; to make reconciliation for the sins of the people, Heb. ii. 17. He doth interpose night and day to prevent breaches, to preserve a mutual correspondence between us and God, and sue out necessary grace for us in all our conflicts and temptations. And this not only for the church in general, but every believing soul, Heb. vii. 25, according to their particular wants, exigencies, and straits: 'He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.'

(3.) The third act respecteth his kingly office, or the actual administration of his kingdom, calling and gathering his people out of the profane world, and appointing laws to them for their direction to true happiness; and then protecting and defending them by his divine power and providence, giving success to his cause and servants, and restraining and subduing their enemies, treading down Satan and all his instruments under their feet, disappointing their attempts, and bringing to nought their counsels, Ps. ii. ; but he doth most fully subdue them at his second coming: Phil. ii. 10, 'That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth.' Now this is a mighty encouragement. Poor creatures will be courageous in the eyes of their master, and he is ready to support and strengthen them, and able to do it. Therefore we should say, as the apostle, 2 Tim. i. 12, 'I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.'

3. The third object is heaven. Looking to heaven is a great ground of christian courage: 2 Cor. iv. 17, 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' There is glory opposite to affliction; a weight, a far more exceeding weight, to light affliction; eternal, to what is momentary. Afflictions are *leves et breves*, light and short; not in themselves (for some may be grievous, and some very long) but comparatively, with respect to our glorious reward, which, being infinite, maketh them light; and being eternal, maketh them short. Alas! no more than a point to the circumference, no more than a feather against a talent of lead. The good and evil of the present world is slight and inconsiderable, but that of the other world truly great. All the pleasures of sense are but as a may-game to our reward; all the troubles of our obedience but as a flea-biting or the scratching of a pin to eternal torments.

[1.] The sight of them. We have no visions and raptures, but first we have the prospect of faith. A believer, by the eye of faith, may by the perspective of the promises look within the veil, and see the reality of those eternal and glorious things which lie in the other world. An object, though never so glorious, cannot be seen without eyes. Now faith is the eye of the soul, Heb. xi. 1. It is defined to be 'the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.' It is good to see how the light and sight of faith differeth from all other lights.

(1.) Compare it with the light of sense, that can only discern things near, and present with us, and before our eyes, as that it is comfortable to eat and drink, and sleep well; to be at liberty, and free from trouble, and to live a life of pomp and sensual pleasure and delight. The sweetness of honour, wealth, and pleasure are known easily, and known by all; this every one can see; but he that hath enslaved his reason to sense 'is blind, and cannot see afar off,' 2 Peter i. 9. The light of faith will discover there is no such danger as perishing for ever; no such worth in anything as in salvation by Christ; no such business of importance as seeking after eternal life.

(2.) Compare it with the light of reason. Reason can only guess at future contingencies, or at best see things in their causes or natural order, and that it is probable, if nothing letteth, such and such things will fall out; but faith can look through all distance of time and place, and contrary appearances, with such certainty and firm persuasion as if the thing were at hand: Heb. xi. 13, 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them;' John viii. 56, 'Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad;' Rom. iv. 18, 'Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations.'

(3.) Compare it with the light of prophecy; that is a seeing: Rev. xx. 12, 'I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God,' &c. They agree in the common object, such things as are revealed by God. They agree in the same common nature, that it is a sight of things absent, or future and to come, with such certainty and clearness as if they were in being. They differ, because faith goeth upon the common revelation which God hath made of his mind to all the saints in scripture; the other upon some special vision and revelation made to certain chosen persons. The light of faith affects the heart with great joy and comfort; the other is usually with rapture and ecstasy.

(4.) Let us compare it with the light of glory, the beatifical vision, that worketh a change in body and soul: 1 John iii. 2, 'We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him.' This in the soul: 2 Cor. iii. 18, 'We all, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord;' 1 Cor. xiii. 12, there see him face to face, as in a glass. Though not as highly affected with the light of faith, yet as truly and really. That nullifieth sin and misery; this mortifieth sin, and fortifieth us against misery. We have not such a full enjoyment of God as by the light of glory, yet by the light of faith we have some communion with him; it somewhat affecteth the heart, as if we saw

God on the throne, Christ in the midst of his holy ones, Paul with his crown of righteousness. It sets us above the clouds in affection; and as to foresight and foretaste, puts us in the midst of the glory of the world to come. Once more, this light of faith is like that sight which God hath of things, for it is the resemblance of it. There is a double knowledge in God, *scientia visionis, et scientia intelligentiæ*. God seeth all things that shall be in his own purpose and decree; knoweth all things that may be by his own all-sufficiency. Faith acts proportionably; it seeth all things that shall be in God's covenant and promises: 2 Cor. v. 1, 'We know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.' It conceiveth what may be by the power of God: Dan. iii. 17, 18, 'Our God is able to deliver us;' though not sure of the event. It realiseth the blessing promised; when they have the promise, they have the pledge of the blessing.

[2.] The Spirit helpeth our sight. Naturally we are short-sighted, and there is a thick mist on eternity; these things are glorious in themselves, above our experience, remote from us, and we take up with toys and children's trifles. Our own natural wisdom bendeth us to present things: James iii. 15, 'This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly &c., Prov. xxiv. 4. Reason is debased by sense, and wholly catereth for the body. Therefore true wisdom is from eyes anointed with spiritual eye-salve, as the apostle prayeth, Eph. i. 17, 18, 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened,' &c.

[3.] The nearer approach to death, the clearer sight of heaven and Christ at the right hand of God, as ready to receive them. The most lively acts of faith are then usually put forth, the spirit being about to return to God. David's last words are noted, Num. xxiii. 1; so Joshua xxiii. 14. Usually there is then a clearer discerning of heaven, more elevated thoughts about it; it seemeth another thing than formerly. They that are nearer heaven, in the borders of it, do more vehemently long for and desire the actual possession of the glorious things.

Use. Let us oftener look within the veil. If you would have God look down upon you, you must look up to him. Faith is acted by serious thoughts. Carnal men mind earthly things; why not we heavenly?

1. Believe that there are invisible good things to be enjoyed in another world. Here is our first work, when we hear of these great promises: 'Believest thou this?' John xi. 26. The things are glorious and certain, but our persuasions of the reality of them are too weak and feeble. That there is a world to come, and a state of invisible happiness and glory, nature guesseth at; for such a conceit hath been noted in the minds of men of all religions, not only Greeks and Romans, but barbarians, and people least civilised. This tradition hath passed from hand to hand throughout all successions of ages; and the nearer we trace it to the first originals of mankind, the more strong and pressing hath been the persuasion hereof. But still it hath borne up itself against all encounters of time, and in the midst of so many revolutions of human affairs, through which many truths are lost; yet this hath maintained itself.

and been readily received by all nations. But if it be dark to nature, the light of christianity doth more clearly discover it. Life and immortality are brought to light in the gospel, 2 Tim. i. 10. Christ, that purchased heaven for us, is gone into it himself, to give us a demonstration of the reality of it, 1 Peter i. 21. Having first left a promise of eternal life to all that believe in him, 1 John ii. 25, which promise was outwardly confirmed by divers miracles. Inwardly in the hearts of his people, by forming them for this estate, and giving them a taste of it in their own souls, 2 Cor. v. 6. Now, is the scripture false, the gospel a fable, the oracles of the prophets, the doctrine of Christ, his miracles, resurrection, and ascension, but a dream? Were they all deceived that followed Christ upon these hopes, and took such pains in subduing the flesh, and hazarding their interests upon the hopes of another world? Are the wisest sort of men the world ever saw fools? Is sanctifying grace a fancy? or the joys of the Spirit delusions or fantastical impressions? The foretastes of the children of God a mere imposture? And is it any way likely that all this solemnity should be used to establish a vain conceit? Well, then, be persuaded of it, as if you saw it with your eyes.

2. Let us often raise our thoughts to the meditation of this heavenly bliss and glory. As a man is, so are his musings. Thoughts, being the genuine birth and immediate production of the soul, do discover the temper of it: Rom. viii. 5, 'They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh,' &c. Those that are of an heavenly temper and frame do often exercise their minds in heavenly things; their happiness lieth there, and their business tendeth thither. Our Lord telleth us, that where the treasure is, there the heart will be, Mat. vi. 21. If the mind were more taken up with these great things, they would breed in us a more excellent and choice spirit. But alas! in most men, thoughts of heavenly blessedness are few and cold, when in the meantime their minds are thronged with all manner of vanity; and therefore do they feel so little of the joys of the Spirit and the efficacy of grace, and do no more get up above the hopes and fears of the world. Certainly they do not hope for heaven that seldom cast a look that way. Where anything is strongly expected, the mind is wont to create to itself images and thoughts, whereby we preoccupy and foretaste the delight of what we expect; for thoughts are the spies of hope sent toward the thing hoped for. If a man were adopted unto the succession of a crown, would he not please himself with the supposition of the honour and pleasure of the royal estate that he shall one day enjoy? They that do not earnestly and warmly think of heaven and heavenly things have little expectation this way.

3. An earnest and desirous expectation. 'Looking for the blessed hope,' Titus ii. 13. Set your affections on it: Col. iii. 2, 'Set your affections on things above.' Groaning after it: 2 Cor. v. 2, 'In this we groan earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven;' Phil. i. 23, 'I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.' Without this, faith is a dead opinion or speculative assent; hope but some cold ineffectual thought. Well, then, long to be at home. Heaven is opened for us; Christ hath carried our nature, our flesh thither, and

advanced it on the Father's right hand ; let us long in person to get thither.

4. So look to these things, that you may get your hearts above all earthly things : 2 Cor. iv. 18, ' While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal.' The act is not simply denied as to things seen, but comparatively, that the world's honour or dishonour may have less influence upon us. In all our actions : 1 Cor. vii. 29, 31, ' The time is short : it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none ; and they that weep, as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy, as though they possessed not ; and they that use this world, as not abusing it : for the fashion of this world passeth away.' We mourn for sin as if we mourned not. We should grow more dead to all impressions of sense. Though carnal satisfactions be near at hand, yet they are but short and inconsiderable : ' Demas loved the present world,' 2 Tim. iv. 10.
