

SERMON XXX.

THE

SIN AND JUDGMENT OF SPIRITUAL BARRENNESS.

*But the miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed ;
they shall be given to salt.—EZEK. xlvii. 11.*

THIS prophecy contains a vision of the glorious, holy, gospel state of the church under the representation of a most glorious temple, incomparably excelling that built of old by Solomon; an exposition whereof we have, 2 Cor. iii. 6—8. &c.

The beginning of this chapter sets out the way and means of the calling and gathering of gospel churches, whose worship is to be so glorious; and this is under a vision of ‘waters issuing out of the sanctuary,’ to heal and quicken all places to which they came.

By the waters here mentioned is the preaching of the gospel intended. And we may observe of them, first, Their rise: which was from the sanctuary. Secondly, Their progress: they increased until they became a river that none could pass over. Thirdly, Their effects or efficacy: they healed all waters where they came, and quickened, or caused to live, the fishes that were in them.

I must not long insist on these particulars.

First, The house or temple from whence these waters issue, may be taken two ways.

1. Mystically, to denote only the presence of God. God dwelt in his temple, thence come these waters, from his presence. He sends out the word of the gospel for the conversion and healing of the nations; Psal. cx. 2. Or,

2. Figuratively, and that either for the place where the temple of old stood, that is, Jerusalem, as the preaching of the gospel was to go forth from Jerusalem, and the sound of it from thence to proceed unto all the world, as Isa. xli. 27.

lii. 7. Acts i. 4. 8. or, for the church of Christ and his apostles, the first glorious, spiritual temple unto God, whence these waters issued.

Secondly, Their progress, which is described by degrees, it being at first small, few men preaching it, and to a few; but afterward increasing, until it filled the whole earth.

Thirdly, The effects mentioned or ascribed unto these waters are two, quickening, and healing; which I shall not in general speak farther unto, because I shall do it in the opening of my text.

In the words of the text you have the state and condition of those places, whither the waters of the sanctuary do come, and the effects before described unto them, are not produced. For so the words are to be read: 'That shall not be healed.'

We have here a description of some lands or places whereunto the holy waters do come. First, They are 'miry and marshy places.' Secondly, The event of the waters coming to them; they 'are not healed.' Thirdly, The consequent of that event; they 'are given unto salt.'

I shall in a few words lay open the allegory, or parable unto you.

First, By the waters of the sanctuary, I told you, is meant the preaching of the gospel, that quickening and healing word which the Lord sends out to gather his church unto himself all the world over; to call his saints to that glorious, gospel, spiritual worship, which is here described in this vision of a temple.

Secondly, The 'miry and marshy places,' where these waters come, are such, where persons cleave inseparably and incurably to their lusts and sins, so that they are not healed by the word. The healing word of the gospel comes, but they receive it not; the water flows over them, they drink it not in, are not quickened, nor healed by it.

Thirdly, To be 'given unto salt,' is to be left unto barrenness; Deut. xxix. 23. Judg. ix. 45. Jer. xvii. 6.

The figurative sense of the passage thus explained, will afford us the following observations.

Observation I. God is pleased oftentimes to send the waters of the sanctuary to 'miry and marshy places,' that 'shall never be healed' by them, nor made fruitful. Or,

God in his infinite wisdom is pleased to send the preaching of the word unto some places, wherein it shall not put forth its quickening and sanctifying power and virtue, upon the souls of them that hear it.

II. All places in the world are barren, unsound and unhealthy, before the coming of the waters of the sanctuary upon them. Or, the souls of all men are spiritually dead and full of woful distempers, until they are quickened and healed by the dispensation of the gospel. The word must come and heal them.

III. The waters of the sanctuary are healing waters. Or, the word of the gospel is in its own nature a quickening, healing, sanctifying, saving word, to them who receive it.

IV. Where the waters of the sanctuary come, and the land is not healed, that land is given up of the Lord to salt or barrenness for ever. Or, where the word of the gospel is, by the infinitely wise disposal of God, preached unto a place, or persons, and they receive it not, so as to have their sinful distempers healed by it, they are usually after a season, given up by the righteous judgment of God unto barrenness, and everlasting ruin.

It is this last proposition, as that which is the direct design and scope of the place, that I intend to insist principally upon. But yet I shall speak somewhat to the former.

I. God is pleased oftentimes in his infinite wisdom to send the preaching of the word unto some places, wherein it shall not put forth its quickening and sanctifying power and virtue, upon the souls of them that hear it.

The whole Scripture, and whole story of the providence of God, in sending the gospel abroad in the world, bears witness to this truth. It was his way from the foundation of the world, and continueth to this very day. Hence was that complaint of the prophet, Isa. liii. 1. 'Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?' The gospel is preached to them that believe not the report thereof. And, chap. xlix. 4. 'Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought.' But we need no greater instance, nor any other than that of our Saviour; who spent the greatest part of his ministry in preaching to them who were never healed, never converted,

nor sanctified by his word. That account he gives of his work, Matt. xi. 21—24. ‘Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida!’ &c.

Now though there be no searching into the depths of the counsels of God; yet there appear many reasons, wherein his wisdom in this dispensation doth shine forth. As,

1. He doth it principally, because in those places where the word is rejected by the generality of the people; yet there may be some secret poor souls belonging to the election of grace, whom God will have gathered, and called home to himself. So for their sakes, though in the world they are taken no notice of, the word shall be preached unto multitudes; Amos ix. 9. ‘I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.’ The grains of Israel must be preserved through all the nations of the earth, that not one grain may be lost. Thus Paul preaches the gospel at Philippi; Acts xvi. 12, 13. And what entertainment meets it withal? He and his companions are taken, and beaten, and cast into prison, sore hurt, and wounded; ver. 22, 23. Why then was it that the gospel must be preached there? Why, there was a stranger come to that town, a poor woman, one Lydia, that dwelt at Thyatira, and she was to be converted, and brought home to God; ver. 14. So at Athens, chap. xvii. 34. And the apostle affirms, that he ‘endured all things for the elect’s sake;’ 2 Tim. ii. 10. Here and there a poor despised person is designed to be called.

2. God doth it for a testimony against them that receive it not, and to leave them inexcusable at the last day; Mark vi. 11. ‘Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them.’ The word is to be preached, and witness, as it were, is to be taken upon it, that it was preached, that men may be left without excuse at the last day. As our Saviour pleads concerning his own preaching to the Pharisees, John xv. 22. ‘Had I not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin.’ God will cause men to be without excuse, by that tender of mercy which is made unto them

in the gospel. It shall be for a testimony against them at the last day.

Use. Let not men boast themselves in the outward enjoyment of the word, nor rest themselves in it. It were well indeed if all were believers to whom the word is preached; if all lands were healed, where the waters of the sanctuary come. But the Holy Ghost tells us, they are not so, Heb. iv. 2. 'The word preached did not profit them.' 'Capernaum was exalted unto heaven,' in the use of means, but 'brought down to hell,' for the neglect of them. Let men look to themselves; God hath various ends in sending the gospel. The Lord knows what will be the end of England's enjoying the gospel so long as it hath done. Sad symptoms appear of a tremendous issue. But I shall speak of this afterward.

II. The souls of all men are spiritually dead, and full of woful distempers, until they are quickened and healed by the dispensation of the gospel.

The waters of the sanctuary must come to quicken them, and heal them. They are distempered therefore, and wofully disordered, before the coming of these waters. So the apostle informs us, Tit. iii. 3—5. 'For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.' Before the gospel grace comes to heal and cleanse them, this is the state and condition of men, as it is more largely described by the apostle, Rom. i. 18. to the end.

I shall not stay to mention all the particular distempers that rage in some, and that rule and reign in all, before the coming of the gospel; as darkness, blindness, ignorance, worldly-mindedness, sensuality, hatred of God, envy and malice, which are fixed in the souls of men by presumption, and self-righteousness. There is nothing in them of spiritual life or holiness, of purity or zeal, nothing that is acceptable or pleasing unto God. But to set forth this to the utmost were to describe the whole natural condition of men.

which is not my present work, and therefore I shall not farther insist on it.

III. The word of the gospel is in its own nature, a quickening, healing, sanctifying, saving word to them who receive it.

They bring Christ along with them, the great physician of souls, who alone is able to cure a sin-sick soul. They bring mercy with them to pardon sinners; that 'the inhabitants of the land may no more say, they are sick, having their sins forgiven them;' Isa. xxxiii. 24. They bring grace with them to cure all the distempers of lusts; Isa. xi. 5—7. Tit. ii. 11, 12.

These things I have only touched upon, and proceed now to the fourth observation, on which I chiefly proposed to insist.

IV. Where the waters of the sanctuary come, and the land is not healed, that land is given up of the Lord, to salt and barrenness for ever. Or, where the word of the gospel is preached unto a place or persons, and they receive it not, so as to have their sinful distempers healed by it, they are given up by the righteous judgment of God unto barrenness and everlasting ruin.

To clear this proposition, I shall shew, 1. What I mean by the coming of the waters of the sanctuary, or the preaching of the gospel to a place, or persons; 2. What by healing their sinful distempers; 3. What by being given up to barrenness and ruin.

1. By the coming of the healing waters of the sanctuary, I intend not the occasional preaching of a sermon, although this be sufficient to justify God in the rejection of any person or people. In the first preaching of the gospel, the refusal of one sermon lost many their souls unto all eternity. When the Lord Jesus sent out his disciples to preach the tidings of everlasting peace, he commanded them to pass through the towns, cities, and villages, and to offer them peace and mercy in the word of truth; which if they received not, they were to shake off the dust of their feet against them; Matt. x. 12—15. Luke x. 8. But, O, the unspeakable patience of Christ to many in the world, where the word is continued oftentimes for a very long season, and the salvation tendered therein despised! But this is that

which I intend, as the rule of the dispensation mentioned : namely, when God by his providence, doth cause the word to be preached for some continuance, and to the revelation of his whole counsel ; as Paul affirmed himself to have done at Ephesus, Acts xx. 27. where he had abode above a year.

Nor do I mean any waters, but the waters of the sanctuary ; not any preaching, but the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which Paul affirms to be his work, Eph. iii. 8. All waters are not the waters of the sanctuary ; all preaching is not the preaching of the sanctuary. There is preaching in the world, wherein God and the souls of men are no more concerned, than in an oration of an ancient heathen. Many undertake to be preachers, who never ‘ stood in the counsel of God,’ as he complains, Jer. xxiii. 22. who never received of the Spirit of Christ, nor knew his mind, blind leaders of the blind. The children of Zion are promised under the gospel, that they shall be all taught of God. And we have men undertaking to be teachers of them, who never learned any thing of Christ. A wicked generation of soul-murderers, for which cursed work they every day invent new engines, whom the Lord’s soul abhors. See their condition and portion, Ezek. xxxiv. 3, 4, &c. I mean therefore a dispensation of the word according to the mind of Christ, the due unfolding of the mystery of the gospel. This is the coming I intend.

2. What is meant by their sinful distempers not being healed ? Look what the waters of the sanctuary come to do ; if that be not effected, they are not healed.

Now there are two effects here ascribed unto the waters of the sanctuary. (1.) They quicken, and give new life, ver. 9. A natural life they had before, but these give them another life. (2.) Healing, as the waters of Jericho by Elisha, 2 Kings ii. 21. Where these effects are not produced, that is the condition described, that is the state of these ‘ miry and marshy places, they are not healed.’

(1.) Men are not quickened ; they receive not a new spiritual life ; they are not so brought to the knowledge of God. It is not enough that men have their affections wrought upon, or their lives in some measure reformed, unless they are quickened ; unless they receive a new spiritual life by the

word, they are as the unhealed places over whom the curse here mentioned hangs.

(2.) The healing of these quickened souls, consists in the curing and mortifying of their sinful distempers. This follows the other. Where there is life, there will be healing. Let not men pretend that they live spiritually, if their lusts be not healed. If men are proud, worldly, sensual, they are dead also; there is no effect of the waters of the sanctuary upon them. If men are not made holy, humble, believing, zealous, if they receive not the Spirit of prayer and faith, they are not healed.

This is the condition of the 'marshy and miry places' here mentioned. God, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, causeth the gospel to be dispensed among a people, to be preached, where they do, or may, and ought to attend unto it. But they are not converted by the word, not sanctified by it, but continue in their old state and condition; he that was filthy is filthy still; he that was unrighteous is so still; he that was in the mire of the world and sin, is so still.

3. What is the lot and portion of such persons? Why, 'they shall be given to salt;' that is, as I have shewed, to barrenness, fruitlessness, unprofitableness, and eternal ruin.

This is the meaning of the proposition; and it is a dreadful word, which yet is true, and will prove so at the last day. Woe to the 'miry and marshy places' of the world: woe to the persons and places to whom the waters of the sanctuary have come, and they are not healed.

I shall not need to insist much on the proof of the proposition, the Scripture so abounds with testimonies of it. But I shall do these three things: 1. Name some places that plainly speak the same truth; 2. Shew the degrees in which God proceeds usually in this great work, in giving up unprofitable hearers to ruin; and, 3. Give the grounds of it.

1. For other Scriptures which assert the same truth; take Prov. i. 25—31. 'But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh: when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for

that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord : they would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.' Prov. xxix. 1. 'He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.' Luke xiii. 6. 'He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none,' &c. So Heb. x. 28—30. 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

2. For the degrees of rejection, see Ezek. x. 18. xi. 23. Heb. vi. 8. 'But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.' They are first rejected, then cursed, and lastly burned. But,

3. That which I shall principally insist upon, is to shew the ways whereby God doth usually proceed in giving up such persons to barrenness, and so to everlasting ruin.

(1.) He casts them out of his care; he will be at no more charge nor cost with them, nor about them. So Heb. vi. 8. the land is *ἀδόκιμος*, 'rejected;' the owner will take no more care or pains about such an unprofitable piece of land: he will till it no more, dress it no more; but leave it to its own barrenness. God is the great husbandman; John xv. 1. When a miry place is not healed, he will cast it out of his husbandry. So Ezek. xxiv. 13. 'They have had their time and season, and 'are not purged;' therefore 'they shall be purged no more.' Jer. vi. 29, 30. 'The bellows are burnt, the lead is consumed of the fire; the founder melteth in vain: for the wicked are not plucked away. Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them.' This the Lord Christ declares to be his way of proceeding with them. Zech. xi. 8, 9. 'My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me. Then said I, I will not feed you; that that dieth, let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another.' A sad parting the Lord knows. They give up Christ; he gives up them; and their meeting will be infinitely more sad to them. Now this the Lord doth several ways.

[1.] He will sometimes utterly remove the gospel from them; turn the stream of the waters of the sanctuary, that

they shall come to them no more. So he threatened the church at Ephesus of old; Rev. ii. 5. 'Remember from whence thou art fallen,' &c. 'or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place.' They shall have the light of the word no more, it shall be removed and taken from them. Ah, how many places lie under this woful judgment of God at this day, this sentence of being given up to salt for ever! Places there are in the world, that have enjoyed the word at God's appointed season, or at least, the tender of it, and opportunity to enjoy it; but continuing unprofitable under it; what is now their state and condition? God hath left them to that sore judgment, that they themselves should be made instrumental to cast out the word from amongst them; like the foolish woman pulling down the house with their own hands; and so have got darkness for a vision, and they that would not rejoice in the truth, and in the light, do now through the tremendous judgment of God, triumph in darkness and in a thing of nought.

It is true, the gospel may be sometimes taken for a season from a people for their trial and exercise, and not penally: it may be driven from them and not absolutely sinned away. Now as the Lord hath many glorious ends in such a dispensation; so it may easily be known whether people have lost the gospel only for a season in a way of trial; or penally as a beginning of their being given up to salt and barrenness. As,

1st. They that are deprived for a season of gospel enjoyments for their trial and exercise, are sensible of the displeasure of God in that dispensation, and greatly humble themselves under his hand on that account. They say as the church in Micah vii. 9. 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me.' They look on this as the greatest calamity and trial that can befall them; whereas they that lose it penally, are either very little concerned about it, or do greatly rejoice at it: the word tormented them, and they are glad they are freed from it; Rev. xi. 10. 'And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that

dwelt on the earth.' Some never rejoice more, than when they are got quit of the gospel; and others are like Gallio. Now when such as these have the word taken from them, and are no way sensible of the displeasure of the Lord in it, nor do humble themselves before him on that account; it is a certain evidence that God is giving them up into a state of salt, that is, barrenness and eternal ruin.

2dly. They that are deprived of it, for a season in a way of trial, have no rest, but are earnest with the Lord for the return of it; 1 Sam. vii. 2. The ark was gone; and though they had peace and plenty, and all things else in abundance; yet all will not satisfy them, the ark is absent, that pledge of God's presence, and they lamented after him. So is it with these; let them have peace, or liberty, or prosperity, all is one; if they have not the ark, if they have not the gospel and ordinances of God, they can take no rest, but are still lamenting after the Lord, still longing after the enjoyment of his word. David doth excellently express this frame of heart, Psal. lxxiii. 1, 2. 'O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is: to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.' He was driven from the ordinances of God, the waters of the sanctuary came not to him. But now they from whom the word is taken penally, are no way troubled about it, nor do long after it; they rejoice in what they have in the room of it; are exceedingly well pleased without it. Let them have an increase of corn, and wine, and oil; let them have their lusts and their sports, their formalities and follies, they care not whether ever they hear of the word of the gospel any more. Such men are certainly entering into a condition of salt, of barrenness, and ruin.

3dly. They who are deprived of the word for a season, for their trial, have a high estimation and value of their mercy and privilege, who enjoy it. They do not think the proud happy, nor envy at prosperous wickedness, nor bow in their hearts before the Hamans of the earth. But those they think blessed, who enjoy the word, and the presence of God therein. This our Saviour teaches them to esteem, Luke xi. 28. 'But he said, yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.' David doth excellently

set out this frame of heart, Psal. lxxxiv. 4. 'Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee. Selah.' I am, saith he, a poor outcast, deprived of thy word and ordinances: O the blessed condition of those who enjoy them! Let them be what they will as to their outward state, they are in a blessed condition, if they may dwell in thy house, enjoy the privileges of the spiritual house of God, and his worship in the gospel. This is the frame of such persons; those only they esteem blessed, who are refreshed with the waters of the sanctuary: but none are more despised by those, from whom the gospel is judicially removed. It is the great, the mighty, the rich, the sensual, that they esteem blessed; for those others they esteem as the dirt or the mire.

Now hence it is, that God may at the same time remove his gospel from a place, judicially from some, and by a way of trial from others, whereby these contrary effects are produced: some are humbled under the hand of the Lord; mourn after his presence; and account them blessed who enjoy his ordinances: others triumph and rejoice in their condition, look upon it as good and blessed, at least are little concerned in the dispensation that God is dealing with them in. And as the Lord doth good to the former by this exercise, preparing them also for farther mercies, in a greater estimation of his word, and profiting under it when enjoyed: so to the other, this is the entrance of their ruin; they are cast out of the care of God; and you never see such a people afterward obtain mercy.

[2.] God doth this sometimes, though he causeth the word to be continued unto them, by restraining the efficacy of it, that it shall not profit them. Men may have lived out their season, that God hath given them to be healed in; and yet God have work to do in that place where they live, so that the word must be preached; some poor souls amongst them are to be quickened or healed, called or edified; so that he will not turn away the course of these holy waters, but continue the dispensation of the gospel. But as for those, who have withstood their season of healing, and are cast out of the care of God, God will so order things, that the word shall have no power upon them. Now though the righteous judgment of God have a hand in this matter; yet by his

permission, their own lusts are the immediate cause of it. As,

1st. They shall have some prejudices against them, by whom the gospel is dispensed in the power and purity of it, which shall keep them from attending unto, or profiting by their message. So in the days of Ahab, there were four hundred preachers that he had a mind to hear; but they were all false prophets, teachers of lies, idolatrous and superstitious: only there were two prophets of the Lord, Elijah the Tishbite, and Micaiah the son of Imlah; and both these he looked upon as his enemies, as persons not well affected unto him; so that he would believe nothing of what they preached. So of Elijah, 1 Kings xxi. 20. and of Micaiah, chap. xxii. 8. So shall it befall many whom God will leave to salt, because the season of their healing hath been withstood; though the word be preached, they shall have prejudices against the dispensers of it, so that they shall not profit by them. And little do they think that these prejudices and hard thoughts are chains and fetters to keep them in unto the judgment of the great day. And of this nature also are other prejudices, that men have.

2dly. He will suffer them to be unconquerably hardened in the love of some sin or lust, which shall keep off the power of the word from their hearts. So the ground here that is not healed, is said to be miry and marshy; such as hath a mixture of filth incorporated with it, sufficient to repel all the virtue of the healing waters of the sanctuary. Thus we see men every day so furiously set upon their lusts, sports, and sensuality, that they hate and are filled with madness and rage against all that would persuade them to sobriety: much more doth the word of the gospel torment them, so that they rise with fury against it; and this keeps them from profiting by it. 'They are given to salt.'

3dly. God withdraws the efficacy of his Spirit in the dispensation of the word, that it shall not have that strength and power on them as upon others. God sends his word towards his own in a way of covenant, and then it is always accompanied with his Spirit; Isa. lix. 21. And where God dealeth with men in covenant mercy, these go together. But now when he casts men out of his care, though the word may be preached to their ear, because of some others whom

he yet cares for ; yet he hath said concerning them, that his ‘Spirit shall strive with them no more :’ and thence it is that the word makes no impression on them : its healing virtue is as to them withheld.

And this is the first thing the Lord doth to such poor creatures as he leaves to salt, to barrenness, and ruin, for despising the season and means of their healing. He casts them out of his care, as to the dispensation of the word.

SERMON XXXI.

WE shall now proceed to the uses.

Use 1. Wonder not if you see a diversity of success in preaching of the word: some receive it with joy; the most despise it as a thing of nought. Whence is this difference? Multitudes are rejected of God, cast out of his care, barren-land, he will till them no more. A cursed state! Marvel not that many refuse to hear the word, that they love lies; they are given up of God to their heart's lusts. Marvel not that the word which they hear affects them no more; the power of the Spirit is withheld from them; multitudes are thus cast out of the care of God, and tokens of the plague are upon them: they like their condition, rejoice and triumph in it, think none so happy as themselves, and despise them that love the waters of the sanctuary: all which are tokens of this sore plague. Can they expel the gospel from any place? Can they quench the light that is in it? Can they triumph over the ways of God? They suppose they have gotten a great victory. This is not an ordinary judgment: they are, poor creatures, assuredly cast out of the care of God; 'they are given to salt;' and it is a miracle of mercy, if ever any of them be healed.

O, it is a woful thing to look on a place or persons that give evidences of their withstanding the season of their healing, as so many in this nation do! How was our Saviour affected with it in reference to Jerusalem; Luke xix. 41, 42. 'And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.' Oh! if we had but any measure of that pity and compassion which dwelt in his holy soul, how could we pass through towns and cities, and see and hear, and not mourn!

Use 2. Take that advice of the prophet, Jer. xiii. 16. 'Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.'

(2.) The second thing that God doth, in giving up an unhealed land unto barrenness, is his judicial hardening of them, or leaving them to hardness and impenitency, that so they may fill up the measure of their sins; Heb. vi. 8. 'That which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing.' When the care of God is once taken from them, they are nigh unto cursing; the next thing that God will do to them, is to curse them, as our Saviour did the barren fig-tree.

This woful judgment is at large set forth, Isa. vi. 9, 10. 'And he said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.' Isaiah was a gospel preacher; yet this, saith God, shall be the effect of thy preaching towards them that have withstood their season, and have not been healed by the word. And John tells us, that this very thing was accomplished, when the gospel was preached by our Saviour himself, chap. xii. 40, 41. And surely their condition is most woful, whom the preaching of the gospel hardeneth, whom the only remedy destroys.

Now there are four things in this spiritual judgment, that God sends upon unhealed souls, that have outlived their season of healing, more or less.

[1.] Blindness of mind and understanding. Their natural blindness and ignorance shall be increased and confirmed; and that by two ways.

1st. God will send them 'a spirit of slumber,' Rom. xi. 8. that is, a great inadvertency and negligence as to the things of the gospel, that are spoken of, or preached unto them. As men that slumber take little notice of what is spoken to them, or about them; they hear a noise, and sometimes discern a little what is spoken, but not to any use or purpose: so is it with these persons, on whom God doth judicially send this spirit of slumber; they hear the sound of the word, and sometimes it may be take notice of some one thing or other that is spoken; but to receive and understand the design of it, to ponder it and improve it, that they cannot do; they are under a spiritual slumber. We may see

multitudes in this condition every day, the word hath no life nor vigour towards them; they perceive not the mind of God in it; they understand it not; God hath given them 'a spirit of slumber,' and they die under it.

2dly. God sends them a spirit of giddiness, causing them to err in their ways; Isa. xix. 14. We have a notable instance of this judgment of God, 2 Thess. ii. 10—12. The waters of the sanctuary came unto them, and they were not healed; the gospel was preached unto them, but they withstood their season; they received not the love of the truth; they did not believe and obey, that they might be saved; because they had pleasure in unrighteousness. How then doth God deal with them? ver. 11. He will send them a spirit of giddiness or delusion, that 'they shall believe a lie,' false doctrine, false worship, superstition, and idolatry. This they shall believe, and have pleasure in; which will have the fearful end mentioned, ver. 12. And this judgment, as it is already come upon many, so it lies at the door, I fear, of the most. We see men every day, that have for some years, it may be, enjoyed the preaching of the gospel, but not being healed, quickened, and sanctified by it, are now with all greediness given up to follow after fables on the one hand, or superstition on the other; there is a spirit of giddiness from the Lord upon them. And by these means is the darkness of the minds of men increased, when God is giving of them up to barrenness.

[2.] Obstinacy in the will, or hardness of heart, properly so called, is in this judgment of God also. God will give up unhealed persons to hardness of heart. So is it in that place of Isa. vi. 10. and it is the same with that which the apostle calls, 'A reprobate mind;' Rom. i. 28. that is, a mind and heart that is good for nothing with regard to spiritual things, profligate, and altogether insensible of them. And when this befalls any, they will openly despise the word, and cast it off, using one foolish pretence or other for their so doing, as Jer. xlv. 16. with xliii. 2. Such persons, whenever the word is preached unto them, and it lies cross to their carnal imaginations, or sensual affections, lusts, or sports, rise up in their hearts with contempt, and rage against it. Sometimes they will colour their wickedness in their hearts by some pretence or other: this is the way,

the humour, the singularity of the preacher. Or sometimes their rage will carry them out directly against the word, without any colour or pretence, but because it displeaseth them. Or if they fall not thus into pride and rage, which usually is occasioned by their temptations, they grow utterly senseless and stupid, and unconcerned in the things of God. Let the word thunder from heaven against their sins, they regard it not. Let the still small voice of the gospel persuade them unto reconciliation, they attend not unto it. Let the judgments of God be abroad in the world, if they escape themselves, they are not concerned about them. Do they reach their own persons; they have wrath, and anger, and vexation; but they cannot repent, or turn to the Lord. This is apparently the condition of most in the world.

[3.] Sensuality of affections is in this judgment also; Rom. i. 26. 'He gave them up to vile affections;' that is, to place their affections on vile, sensual things. Unhealed persons shall do so. Our streets, ale-houses, and many other places, are full of such whose affections are fixed with madness on vile things; and they please themselves in them, little thinking that this is part of the judgment whereunto they are given up of God, for their unprofitableness under the word; for their not being healed by the waters of the sanctuary.

[4.] Searedness of conscience; 1 Tim. iv. 2. 'Having their conscience seared with a hot iron.' Eph. iv. 19. 'Being past feeling.' Whatever sin they commit, or condition they fall into, conscience shall no more discharge its duty in them, and towards them.

And this is the second thing that God will do towards such unhealed persons.

(3.) The third thing considerable is the event of this dealing of God with them; or what is meant by this land's becoming salt.

Two things, as I have shewed before, are hereby intended: [1.] Barrenness in this world; [2.] Eternal ruin in the world to come.

[1.] Barrenness: they shall never bear any fruit to God. This was the curse that our Saviour gave to the fig-tree: 'Never fruit grow on thee.' Man was made to bear fruit

unto God; this is all he came into the world for. Now when God shall say to any, Go your ways, you shall never do any thing more for me, whilst you live in this world; you shall never bear any fruit to me: what sorer judgment can any man possibly fall under? I might shew you the misery of this condition in many particulars. 'Israel is an empty vine;' Hos. x. 1.

[2.] Eternal ruin, and that irreparable. Prov. xxix. 1. 'He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.' John xv. 6. 'If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.' 2 Thess. ii. 12. 'That they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.' Heb. vi. 8. 'But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.' This is the certain event of that land, that is left unto salt, because not healed; and of those persons, who having passed over their season of quickening and sanctifying by the word, are given up to barrenness and ruin. It will do neither me nor you good to flatter you, and to put you into any better hope, than your condition will admit of. See Ezek. xxxiii. 8. 'When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.' This will be the end of the one and the other, when that course is taken. Did I not see the tokens of this judgment of God abroad in the world, I would not thus insist upon it as I do.

Use 1. Of exhortation. Make use of your season, that you fall not under this sore and inexpressible judgment. God gives men a season, a space to repent in; Rev. ii. 21. This space and season, as I have shewed you before, is not oftentimes all the while that the gospel is preached unto you. The word may be preached, and yet its efficacy wholly restrained from you, and that because your time and season is gone. And so it comes to pass daily; and you know not how soon it may be your lot and portion, and you perceive it not. Therefore is the apostle so earnest in exhorting men to make use of their day, before their season be gone, Heb.

iii. 12, 13. 'Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' As if he should say, Take heed to yourselves, stir up yourselves, for if your day be once passed over, you are then gone for ever; it will then be too late for you to look out after mercy. And so again, 2 Cor. vi. 2. Now is the day; now is the time. If you stand in need of any commodity, that can be had but at one fair, that day, that season you will not neglect. You stand in need, I am sure, of grace, mercy, pardon, Christ, life, salvation; there is only this day, this season for you to obtain it in: O, that you would be persuaded to look out after it, before it be hidden from you! See Heb. x. 31. 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' So the same apostle again, Heb. xii. 15. 'Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God.' Use all diligence in this matter.

To excite you a little to this, consider,

(1.) That if you are not healed during your season, you can never be healed. If the gospel cure you not, you must die in your sins. Men are greatly mistaken, when they flatter themselves, that it can never be too late for them in this world, there is time enough whilst they are alive. Alas! you have but your season; and that may be over with you many days before you leave the world, yea many years. We have everywhere ground evidently 'left to salt,' though yet not burned up. Use your day.

(2.) You know not how your day is going away, nor when it will be over. The traveller on the road, that hath a journey to go, knows how to order his affairs. It is, saith he, so many hours to night, and I have time enough before me; so doth the labouring man also: but, alas! it is not so with you; you know not how soon your day may be over. I speak not of your lives, which the Lord knows are uncertain; but the day of the gospel may be over, whilst the day of your lives continue. Nor can you be certain of the day of the preaching of the word; but your day, and your season in it, may come to an end, this day or this night, for ought that you or I know. So that your concernment is unspeakably great in the proposal that is made unto you.

Remember the virgins that were shut out, and their cry at midnight.

You will say then, What shall we do to know when it is our season, that we may apply our hearts unto this exhortation?

I answer: The Lord alone, who is the searcher of all hearts, knows how it is with you; and whether you have not any of you in particular outstood your opportunity. I can only tell you what is a gospel season, which you are to take care, that you may have a share and interest in.

[1.] It is required that the gospel be preached in the power and purity of it. This in general makes 'the acceptable day, the time of salvation.' And if there be nothing else concurring, this is enough to let a people, or person know, that the day of the Lord is come upon them, that the waters of the sanctuary are come unto them. Now consider with yourselves, whether the gospel be preached unto you or not. Or whether you may not, or might not have it so preached unto you, or enjoy the dispensation of it, did you but discharge your duty. If it be so, this is one evidence that it is yet your day.

[2.] It is a special season, when providential calls do join in with, and farther gospel calls; when God causes the gospel to be dispensed unto a people, and at the same time puts forth some acts of his providence, that are suited to awaken men to the consideration of their state and condition, then is the season of that people. I shall not go over the several providential calls that have been upon us, to inquire after the ways of God. Are all the alterations that have been amongst us, discovering the great uncertainty of all things that are here below, no call? Was there no call in the great unseasonableness of the year? No call in the danger of the loss of the gospel, which seems to stand ready for its flight from you? the great uncertainty how long you may enjoy these waters of the sanctuary? It is certain, that if you have not neglected already your season, your day of grace, you are now under the time that you are to be tried in.

[3.] Then is the season, when God moves at some seasons more effectually upon your hearts and spirits in the dispensation of the word, than at other times. This you alone can give an account of; you only know how it is with you; you can tell, whether you have not been moved by the

word more than formerly, or convinced by it; whether you have not had purposes of amendment and reformation wrought in you by it; whether you have not been caused to love it more than you have done formerly; whether it hath not begotten at times resolutions in you to try for life and immortality. If it have not, it is much to be feared lest the Lord is leaving of you to salt, to an estate of perishing and everlasting ruin. But if you have had such effects wrought in you, know of a certain, that the kingdom of God hath come unto you; and if you withstand your opportunity, you are gone and undone for ever, unless you make thorough work before this dispensation be overpast.

[4.] When you see others about you earnest after the word; this is God's call and ordinance unto you to look to your own condition.

If now by any of these means you come to know that the day of the Lord, and the season of your healing is upon you; oh, that you would be prevailed with to be wise for your own souls, and to close with the word of the gospel, before the things of your peace be hidden from your eyes!

I thought, in the next place, to have given you the signs of a departing gospel day, and evidences of men's having out-lived their season, and being given up to salt and barrenness; but for some reasons forbear.

Use. 2. To discover the miserable condition of poor creatures, that having not in their season been healed by the waters of the sanctuary, are given up of the Lord to salt and barrenness. No heart can conceive, nor tongue express the misery of such poor creatures. Let me only mention some particulars.

(1.) They know not that they are so miserable. They perceive not, they understand not the sore judgment that they are under. Do but their heads ache, or are they sick of an ague, they feel it presently, and seek out for remedies; but in this case the curse of God is upon them, and they do not at all perceive it, and so seek not out for relief; Hos. vii. 9. 'Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.' They are nigh to ruin, to destruction, and perceive it not, they take no notice of the misery that is at hand ready to devour them; or if at any time they begin so

to do, they shift off the thoughts of it, which is a great part of their misery.

(2.) They are pleased with the condition in which they are; 'they cry peace and safety, when sudden destruction is at hand;' 1 Thess. v. 3. They please themselves in their condition, when the vengeance of the Lord is ready to seize upon them. Is the gospel removed from them, and the streams of the sanctuary turned away? They are so far from being troubled at it, that they rejoice in it, as hath been declared: they think they may now follow their lusts freely, and do whatever seems good unto themselves: they despise others and bless themselves, as if all were well with them. Or is the word yet continued, but they left to senselessness and salt under it? They are pleased with their estate, wonder at those who are troubled under the word, and exceedingly despise them. All is well with themselves; and some of them are ready to deride all others that are under the work of the Lord. On this account it is, that they do not, will not, look out for relief, or healing.

(3.) No man can help, or relieve them. Men may pity them, but they cannot help them. All the world cannot pull a poor creature out from under the curse of the great God.

(4.) Their eternal ruin is certain, as before proved.

(5.) This ruin is very sore on gospel despisers.